

Home Service for May 21, 2023

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Lifting his hands, Jesus blessed them.

Call to Worship:

What a glorious vision! Jesus gave the glorious promise of an Advocate! Then he ascended to God! What joy there must have been in the hearts of the disciples. May God find such joy in our hearts and spirits! Prepare us, Lord, for the mighty works you place before us. AMEN.

Opening Prayer:

Lord of amazing visions, prepare our hearts and our spirits this day to receive your glad tidings of an Advocate. Help make us ready to be your disciples in all that we do, say, and think. For we ask this in the name of our beloved Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Prayer of Confession:

We have to confess, O Lord, that we are people who want to have everything proven for us. We hear the message in the scripture of Jesus' ascension, and we smile smugly, not truly believing the vision. Forgive us for our arrogant doubts and attitudes of smugness. Help us remember that everything Jesus taught us was to prepare us to help build God's realm here on earth. We are called to be people of faith, not of absolute proof, as we understand it. Let us place our trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Let us look with eyes of faith as he ascends to the Father. We pray in his Name, AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Although you have not stood on the mountaintop to see his ascension to God, yet believe in the love and power of Christ who taught you how to be faithful and joyful disciples. Rejoice, and believe in him who came that you may have abundant life. AMEN.

Read Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

May God arise, may his enemies be scattered;
may his foes flee before him.

² May you blow them away like smoke—
as wax melts before the fire,
may the wicked perish before God.

³ But may the righteous be glad
and rejoice before God;
may they be happy and joyful.

⁴ Sing to God, sing in praise of his name,
extol him who rides on the clouds^[b];
rejoice before him—his name is the LORD.

⁵ A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.

⁶ God sets the lonely in families,^[c]
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

⁷ When you, God, went out before your people,
when you marched through the wilderness,^[d]

⁸ the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain,
before God, the One of Sinai,
before God, the God of Israel.

⁹ You gave abundant showers, O God;
you refreshed your weary inheritance.

¹⁰ Your people settled in it,
and from your bounty, God, you provided for the poor.

³² Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth,
sing praise to the Lord,

³³ to him who rides across the highest heavens, the ancient heavens,
who thunders with mighty voice.

³⁴ Proclaim the power of God,
whose majesty is over Israel,
whose power is in the heavens.

³⁵ You, God, are awesome in your sanctuary;
the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people.

Praise be to God!

Prayers of the People:

Go back to Jerusalem and wait, Jesus said to his disciples. Lord, we are not good at waiting for anything. We want to know what to do right now, right here. We want the plan all laid out for us so that we can project the end results. We have some real control issues to overcome, Lord. Take our spirits and release the need for control for them. Help us place our total trust in your abiding love and presence. Give us patience and persistence in our ministries and mission. As we bring to you the names of dear ones whose lives are in need of your healing mercy and comfort, remind us that we also stand in need of those same mercies. Give us courage to accept your love and strength to witness to your love in all that we do. In Jesus' Name, we pray. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Acts 1:6-14

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

¹² Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk^[a] from the city. ¹³ When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of

Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 17:1-11

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

⁶ “I have revealed you^[a] to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of^[b] your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

Message

This past Thursday the church celebrated the Ascension of the Lord. The day when Christ left this world to return to heaven and to sit on the right hand of our Heavenly Father. Today we find God's angels ask the disciples why they are still standing at the place of Jesus' ascension. For they and we are to go to share God's kingdom of grace as we watch for God's kingdom of glory.

At different times in our lives we are faced with various senses of duty. In school we have a sense of duty to our studies. In marriage we have a sense of duty for our spouse and family. In our job we have a certain sense of duty to our employer. As believers we are privileged to know that our lives have a sense of duty to share God's gospel with the world, but sometimes we may forget the urgency for this task. For 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14,15 states: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." The angels remind us of our mission.

The disciples had been with Jesus during miracles, teachings, crucifixion, death, and resurrection, yet they wanted to know if Jesus will restore the kingdom of Israel. Jesus' disciples were still thinking of Jesus as an earthly king to drive out the Romans.

The disciples would receive power and be the ones to extend God's kingdom. They needed to remember that God's kingdom was and is spiritual and needed to be extended to all nations.

Jesus had risen into the sky. A cloud conceals Jesus from them. They stand there wondering, "What next?" God has to send his angels to bring the disciples back to their senses. The disciples see and hear. The Angels marked the importance of this event for they did not come very often during Jesus' life. Only five times: Birth, Wilderness temptation, Garden of Gethsemane, Resurrection and now Ascension. The disciples have much more important things to do than just looking into the empty sky.

Even though Jesus' disciples had close contact with Jesus for three years they were still focused on an earthly kingdom rather than spiritual. So it is the same for many today, that hasn't changed. Some actually feel that by believing they deserve a better life than others, while others preach that faith will result in great material blessings. Our heavenly Father is concerned about our earthly life, but He is far more concerned about his kingdom of grace. Jesus warned against false prophets. Faith is by God's own grace.

God's word is still the truth. The Bible is the only truth that reveals the gospel of Jesus Christ for the salvation of mankind. In our day and age truth is relative. This means that each person can determine his or her own truth for himself or herself. Absolute truth is thought to be impossible. When we tell others that Scripture is God's truth they counter with the thought that that is your truth, not mine. Rejoice that God has revealed his truth to you. Celebrate that we do not sit in darkness as many in this world. "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 PETER 1:16). By God's grace we have seen the wonders of the majesty of God as clearly revealed to us in his word of truth. We can share God's truth.

Sharing the truth of God is not always easy. We are born into this world as God's enemies, not God's messengers. Like the disciples we stand in wonder and awe that God has called us, has chosen us, and now sends us out to the very ends of the earth. Our world is searching for answers. The times are evil and the hearts of many are growing colder and colder and darker and darker. We have the answer. God gives us the solution to solve man's deepest needs. We are to share God's grace for God's glory, not our glory. We are to share God's kingdom of grace with those still in the dark.

The disciples had much to think about. Jesus told them they would receive power, but they did not know when Pentecost would accrue. Jesus had told them they were to go to the ends of the earth, to all nations, even Gentiles. Now the angels bring them back to their senses, reminding them that they still had work to do. The disciples did not know when Jesus would return. But he would return in the same way.

The disciples go back to Jerusalem. They go back to familiar surroundings among friends. God knows the names of all his believers. Judas Iscariot has gone to "his own place". How to understand all these things? They prayed. We are told that the women were also included.

Certainly the disciples still had many, many questions about all of these recent events. It is only 40 days after Jesus' resurrection. Once again, Jesus has left them. When will he return? They did not know when. We do not know when the Lord Jesus will come back to judge the living and the dead. How do we solve all of those things we wonder about? Is the Lord coming soon? Maybe. Will things get better? We do not know. Like Jesus and his disciples we pray. To know Christ

better is our highest calling in this life. Only in knowing Christ better do we begin to understand God's great love for us and for all of humanity.

Thankfully and joyfully the Lord God Almighty does not leave us on our own to figure out everything for ourselves. Instead the Lord God Almighty gives us his holy word. In Scriptures are the promises of God. In a world of self-reliance and independence every believer is blessed to be able to rely on God and depend on God. Our Lord is faithful even when we are not. God keeps us strong.

How soon the Lord will return, we simply do not know. We do know that the Lord will return in the same way that he was taken up into heaven. Jesus will come back on his throne of glory in the clouds. Once again, the angels will also be there. In most of the parables concerning Judgment Day the message is the same. As Matthew 24:42,44 states: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.... So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." Since we do not know when Jesus will return we are to be watching: diligently and always.

Sometimes God has to wake us up just like the angels did for the disciples. Why are you standing or we might say sitting here? Thoughtless thousands and many millions still sit in darkness. To be comfortable in sharing God's kingdom of grace takes work. Even the hard working early prophets were not always so willing to go out in the name of the Lord. They knew that God's calling could not be taken lightly. They learned that God's call was compelling. The Lord God Almighty calls each of us into his kingdom of grace so that we might share his gospel with others. We never give up as we constantly watch for the return of Jesus and his kingdom of glory. Amen.

Benediction:

Christ is lifted up! As he withdrew, he offered a blessing. Receive his blessing today and be commissioned to serve God in this world. Offer healing to the broken and care to the empty. Transform the world through your faithfulness. Amen.