

AWESOME ASCENSION



Scripture:

Luke 24:44-53

⁴⁴Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

⁵⁰Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



AWESOME ASCENSION

I continue to be amazed at the way Jesus took care of preparing his disciples for his departure. He had what I call, an “awesome ascension” because he prepared his disciples very well for his ascending.

MOTHER’S DAY

Since it is Mother’s Day, can you remember the way your mother prepared you for a time when she needed to be away from you? How did she get you ready for your separation?

My mother went to technical college when I was in kindergarten. I remember being worried about not going straight home from school because she arranged for my neighbor to take care of me. But very quickly all my worries about being cared for by another disappeared because I learned to deeply love my surrogate grandma and called her “Grandma Vogt.”

MOTHERLY CARE

How many of you have had women in your lives who were not your mother but provided you motherly love and guidance? You don’t have to give birth biologically to provide motherly care. Many single Dads are both mother and father as our parent God is both mother and father.

Jesus wanted to be sure his disciples were not afraid and well taken care of like a parent prepares their children for the first day of school, or for a new day care situation.

GRANDMA VOGT

My mother picked the perfect person for me. She taught me how to get eggs out from under chickens in their chicken house; she taught me how to use an outhouse because when she first started taking care of me after school she didn’t have an indoor bathroom! And in the Iowa winter time it got pretty cold out there!

Grandma Vogt taught me how to play Rummy and how to care for the mentally disabled. I think one of the reasons I became a psychiatric nurse therapist is because I learned that my Grandma Vogt’s son, Don, who lived with her, had “Shell Shock and that is why he didn’t talk to anyone.

He stayed mostly in his room when he wasn’t out on the farm planting and harvesting and caring for the livestock.

At dinnertime Don burped a lot. As a kid, at first I giggled, until Grandma told me Don had stomach problems. During World War II, Don had been a prisoner of war for two years in a Nazi prison camp in Germany. He almost starved to death and the residual effects made digestion difficult years later.

By being in Grandma and Don’s presence daily, I saw how my Grandma Vogt mothered him and loved him despite his odd ways. She never pressured him to be anything different.

Don was seventy and Grandma Vogt was eighty-nine when she became my afterschool caretaker. She lived to be one-hundred-three. When Don died, Grandma was one-hundred and she told me it was very hard to outlive her son. She couldn’t figure out why God was making her hang around here on earth any longer.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

On the day of his Ascension, Jesus prayed for his disciples, he blessed them and reminded them of the scriptures and of his purpose on earth. He told them to proclaim forgiveness, and handed over his ministry with the power of the Holy Spirit to guide them. I bet their minds were swirling and their bodies were shaking!

Professor Barbara Lundblad of Union Theological Seminary in New York City commented that Jesus' disciples must have felt the earth slipping beneath their feet at the thought of being left alone. They had been on a roller coaster ride of emotions ever since Palm Sunday when they joyfully followed Jesus into Jerusalem. Then when Christ was arrested they must have felt great fear, as they witnessed his torturous death.

And then the unbelievable resurrection of Jesus, no longer dead, but alive, put them into shock for awhile and then deep disappointment when they understood he wouldn't stay. In fact, Jesus spoke as if he was already gone, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you..."

His words must have seemed very confusing to the disciples until Jesus opened their minds and interpreted the meaning of all that had taken place.

POWER FROM ON HIGH

Finally, Jesus promised more when he said, "See, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

What did he mean? What was this "power from on high"? Jesus doesn't say "Holy Spirit" here, but he means the same Spirit that came as a dove at his baptism, the same Spirit that anointed him to preach good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed. This same "power from on high" would now be given to the disciples and by extension, to us. This is such an amazing mysterious gift from beyond ourselves. (Next Sunday we celebrate Pentecost.)

**In John's gospel, Jesus compared the Spirit to the wind. You hear the sound of it, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes.
Though we cannot see the Spirit, we can see where the Spirit has been.**

Sometimes we will see peace where there was chaos, joy and hope where there

was deep despair, and love where there was hate.

DURER'S WOODCUT OF CHRIST'S ASCENSION

There's a wonderful work of art that is a woodcut of Christ's ascension by Albrecht Durer. I put part of the image on the front of the bulletin (and the illustration on page one with the sermon title.) If you look closely at the picture, you can see the footprints that Jesus left on the ground beneath him. Durer carefully outlined Jesus' footprints on the earth where the disciples are standing. The artist was imagining that even though we can't see Jesus in the flesh today, we can see where he left his footprints.

The imprints left behind in Christ's ascension were reminders that the Spirit lives on with us. Emmanuel, God with us in the form of the Holy Spirit.

FOOTPRINTS OF CHRIST

Think about all the places that have the footprints of Christ. When I was in Israel that was one of the amazing thoughts that kept coming to my mind. I was walking on the same ground where the feet of Jesus Christ walked! I was following in his foot steps!

Christ's feet carried him up the mountains, balanced him on top of the water, sat under him at tables surrounded by odd companions, walked him over to children that he gathered onto his lap. His feet hiked to a well where a Samaritan woman became an evangelist, and into the homes of both the wealthy and the poor in need of healing.

We can look at the footprints of Jesus to see where the Spirit of the Lord has been. God breathed the Spirit and brought Jesus forth from the tomb. And when the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples, he said, "Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." From now on, Jesus says, I will be with you in the power of the

Spirit. Though I am leaving, you will not be alone.

THE SPIRIT

The Spirit that anointed Jesus anoints us, still breathes in us and surprises us. The Spirit still shapes this community called Church of the Roses by blessing us - for example with new church family members.

We are the disciples today who look for his footprints and signs of the Spirit remaining with us after Jesus ascended. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit still enables us to accomplish Christ's mission on earth. We know the spirit of God is present supporting us because it speaks through the tender loving care from our mothers, grandmothers, and surrogate mothers who role model how to nurture and sustain ourselves and others.

I believe I would be a very different person today if my mother had not found Grandma Vogt to take care of me. She and Don became our extended family and always joined us for Easter, Christmas, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and for birthday dinners. And we picked up Grandma Vogt and drove her to church with us every Sunday, too.

Sometimes I think about Don Vogt and how he couldn't go to church because he couldn't talk to people. And that was OK. I learned from Grandma Vogt how to accept people and their limitations without judgment. The spirit was strong and loving in Grandma Vogt and it lives in me now, too.

The power of the most high is in each one of us and enables us to do far greater things than we can hope for or imagine. So tap into that power source and trust that although Christ ascended, you are never without him.

This reminds me of a reading that was a favorite of Mary Olson's called:

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

by Mary Stevenson:

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.

Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was one set only.

This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints, so I said to the Lord, "You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, were you not there waling alongside me?"

The Lord replied, "The times when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, are the times when I carried you."

Amen

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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May 8, 2016**