



ASCENSION SUNDAY
MAY 29, 2014

FIRST LUTHERAN
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

ACTS 1:1-11; PSALM 47/93; EPHESIANS 1:15-23; LUKE 24:44-53

Don't Just Stand There...

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

I love this story about Jesus' ascension into heaven. It's the culminating act in the incredible series of events that have unfolded since...Jesus was crucified some five weeks earlier.

Let's **refresh** our memories and recall all that has happened since the dawn of that First Easter morning:

- The Lord appeared to Mary and many more of his followers.
- He has walked, talked and eaten with them.
- He has explained God's Word to them.
- And Jesus has given them a very important mission – to go into the world and teach about God's love.

Now, with all that visitation, affirmation, education and confirmation...wouldn't you think that Jesus' followers would be fairly *on board* with the Lord's master plan?? And yet, as we heard, it seems that the disciples still don't "**get it**" about **Jesus**, what he came to do **and** what their role is in what comes next.

So let's take a closer look now at the passage from Acts. I want you to tell me: **what are some clues that maybe the disciples are still a little... clue-less?**

- 1) Their question: ***Lord, now will you restore the kingdom to Israel?*** (v. 6). How many times and in how many ways did Jesus explain to them that he did **not** come to save a ship that's sinking, to glue together something that's broken, to fix-up a foundation that's crumbling on the inside???

His is a kingdom that knows **no** national identity, **no** set borders, **nothing** to tie it to gender, race, social status – any of those categories that divide us one from another. In **fact**, he is doing **exactly** the **opposite**.

- 2) Another clue is the disciples' reaction (or non-action) when Jesus ascends into the cloud. Look at v. 10. What happens? They just **stand there** looking up.

Two angels have to come down and do *crowd control*, telling Jesus' followers, *It's all over, folks - there's nothing more here for you to see!* In other words, the angels say: **Don't just stand there...?!?**

So what do you think is the reason for their inaction? **What's the dilemma that delays them from going to work, from engaging in Jesus' mission, from proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed? What fears might they fighting?**

It **could** be the fear of *abandonment*. Think back to the night of Jesus' betrayal. Remember when he told his followers that **all** of them would **desert** him? He quoted Zechariah 13:7 when he said that the shepherd will be struck...*and the sheep of the flock will be scattered*. **So** he was **killed**, and **so** they all *ran away*...

Well, **hardly** have these sheep been *reunited* with their shepherd...when now he's **leaving** them *all over* again. I *suspect* they're battling that sense of **fear** that we *all* know when we:

- Leave **home** for the very first time; or
- Try to **cope** with the **loss** of a parent, spouse or child; or
- Lose a respected **boss** at **work**, or **teacher** at **school**...

We ask: *What am I supposed to do now?*

How can I go on?

Who's going to be our leader?

My wife tells the story from years back when she was a substitute teacher waiting to get hired for a full time position. Her training was with upper elementary students, but one day she took a job for a *kindergarten* teacher who was sick. **Anyone want to describe what happened when those kids walked in the room and discovered that a *stranger* had taken Mrs. Johnson's place?**

Fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear of the future, fear of failure – it reminds me of that famous quote by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his first inaugural address during a very difficult time in our nation's history. Said the new president, *First of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself -- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.*

We know that fear – on a personal level, as a family of faith, as a community, as a country. We know what it feels like to waste our energy on worry – when what's needed is to convert it into doing something positive, something hopeful, something helpful...

And we're obviously not alone. **If it's true** that the followers of Jesus are **afraid to take action**, to move forward, to enter their community **and** to embrace God's mission for the sake of the world...then we're all in pretty good company. **Flip through the bible in your mind's eye and think of some *other* characters who also were afraid to answer God's call...**

Abraham/Sarah – both worried for **years** that God would not fulfill his three-fold promise of land, descendants and blessing

Moses – greatly feared facing the mighty Pharaoh and demand freedom for his family and friends

The prophet Jeremiah – felt fearful about speaking God's Word since he was only a boy

Jesus' mother Mary – had to feel fear when recalling Simeon's

words over her baby at the Temple: *and a sword will pierce your own soul too.*

I, for one, am thankful that we know of *their* fear – because **you** and **I** have been and will be found in very similar places – **hiding behind locked doors**, **giving in** to the power of worry, saying **No** to God because we're just *too afraid* of what might go wrong ...

Now, the **good** news is that there's some **help** for all of us who fumble around with fear. It can be **found**, I believe, by observing...*wood ducks*. I shared this with some of our women last year at the Ascension Day celebration at Ascension Lutheran Church in Minneota.

My mother-in-law lives up north in Ada, Minn. Year after year wood ducks would return to their yard to raise their young. Now, a unique thing about wood ducks is that they can nest high in a tree. Well, when **these** ducklings were hatched, **and** the mother decided that they were ready for life...well, **can someone tell us what a wood duck mother would do in that situation?**

She took off – flew to the ground below and waited for her young ones to **follow**... *That's it* – that was her **one lesson in flying!** **So**, like little paratroopers *standing in the door*, that's what the **ducklings** did...they **jumped**, or *fell* out of the nest, **flapped** their useless little wings and **hit** the ground with a **thud!** Now a great majority **survived** their fall, **shook** their heads, **stumbled** around, eventually **found** their mother – and then **fell in-line** **behind** her like good little soldiers.

In their dramatic entrance to the world, I see a **parallel** to the **challenges** that **Jesus' followers** faced – those that **you** and **I** must **embrace** as well.

When Jesus *takes off* and the angels symbolically *push* the disciples out of their nest, it might seem a little **harsh** at first. But in **reality**, this is what they've been **training** for from the moment they first heard Jesus say, *Follow me*. They've heard him **preach** and **teach**; they've seen him **help** and **heal**; they've experienced his **power** and **presence** as **God-on-earth!**

They have been given everything they need for the journey, the job, the joys and the challenges ahead.

Turn to our 2nd Reading from Ephesians... There the author lists a number of the gifts that come from God to those who belong to Christ:

- a spirit of wisdom & revelation (17)
- an enlightenment of the eyes of their hearts (18)
- the hope to which they are called (18)
- the riches of God's glorious inheritance (18)
- and the immeasurable greatness of God's power for all who believe (19).

What **more** could they want...? What **more** could we want? Say the **angels** to the **disciples** – and to us – *Don't just stand there, do something with the gifts you've been given!* Amen.