

## Christ Has Gone Up

Acts 1:1-11 & Luke 24:44-53

Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church

1001 W Colfax Ave, South Bend, Indiana 46616

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### Acts 1:1-11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup>until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup>For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>6</sup>So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>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.”

<sup>9</sup>After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. <sup>10</sup>They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup>“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.”

### Luke 24:44-53 (NIV)

<sup>44</sup>He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup>He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

<sup>50</sup>When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup>While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup>And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

## Christ Has Gone Up

Some people look with bewilderment at some of the racial strife in our society today — particularly the tension between the “Black lives matter” movement and police departments across our land. However, some of you are old enough to know that we have been here before.

In his book, *On a Wild and Windy Mountain*, Bishop Will Willimon tells of being in New Haven, Connecticut as a student at Yale in 1970 during the famous Black Panther Trial. Those of you who remember that turbulent era recall the strife, the discord and the agony that tormented our society in those days.

During the week that the crisis in New Haven reached its peak, Willimon attended a choral mass at a nearby Catholic Parish. A boy's choir was singing, "Deus Ascendit — "God Has Gone Up."

"Just as I thought," Willimon said to himself somewhat sarcastically, "God Has Gone Up. And isn't that typical? Gone up, up away from New Haven and the angry shouts of the mob and the gunfire of the cops and the revolutionaries." In other words, Willimon was saying to himself, "God has abandoned us."

As he continued to listen, though, the idea struck him that the choir was not singing, "Deus Abscondit," God has abandoned us. The boys were singing "Deus Ascendit." God has gone up. Willimon reflected, "God has begun in heaven what is yet to be accomplished here on earth. Christ is gone — not to forsake us — but to continue to redeem us. He has gone to take charge, to rule, to put all things under His feet." Deus Ascendit. God has ascended.

The setting for our lesson today is the Mount of Olives. Jesus has broken bread with His disciples. He has announced to them that soon they will be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and when the Holy Spirit has come upon them, they will be given power to be witnesses for Him, not only in Jerusalem, not only throughout Judea, not only in Samaria, but to the very ends of the earth. When Jesus had spoken these words, He was lifted up before them into the heavens until a cloud hid Him from their sight. Deus Ascendit.

The scriptures say that as the disciples stood there gazing into the sky, two men dressed in white stood beside them and said, "Men of Galilee, 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."

At this the disciples returned to Jerusalem, and on entering the city they went straight to the upstairs room where they had been staying. The writer of Acts tells us that, "They all joined together constantly in prayer... (v. 14)."

CAN YOU IMAGINE THE EFFECT OF THE ASCENSION ON THESE EARLY DISCIPLES?  
CAN YOU IMAGINE THEIR FEELINGS OF AWE AND ADORATION?

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?" They had seen Christ ascend to the Father. They would no longer ask who is in charge, because they knew that Christ now sat at the right hand of God. Even more significantly, they knew that they were connected to Him — forever!

There is a humorous story that came out of Hollywood many years ago. A famous and handsome movie star checked into a hospital. As might be expected, every nurse in the hospital was very attentive to his needs. One particularly attractive nurse was at his side nearly every time he moved.

When he finally indicated that he would like to be alone for a little while she said, “Now if you want anything at all you need only to pull this cord.”

The movie star gave his irresistible smile and said, “Thank you, my dear, but what is the cord attached to?” She smiled back and answered, “Me.”

The disciples knew that Christ had ascended to be with the Father. But they also knew that they were connected to Him. That gave them a great sense of confidence and boldness that would display itself beginning with, and long after, Pentecost. Even though they did not know what the future held, they knew who held the future.

It is said that the wife of Albert Einstein was once asked if she understood her husband’s theory of relativity. She replied, “No — but I know my husband and I know he can be trusted.” The disciples knew that Christ was with the Father and that Christ could be trusted. They believed that He was in charge, and that made all the difference.

I am so thankful that I am not in charge of the universe. When I look over my life and see the times when I acted out of what I thought was good judgment, and yet made some very stupid choices, I am glad God is in charge and not me.

I got a chuckle out of a story about a young woman who went away to college in the fall leaving her plants and her goldfish in the care of her mother, who had a tendency to be forgetful. Some of us may know somebody with a “brown thumb.” This mother had one. The plants that the daughter left behind in the care of her mother died at the end of the month. The mother dutifully broke the bad news to her.

When the young woman called a week later, her mother confessed that the goldfish had died as well. There was a long pause, then in a fearful voice the girl asked, “How’s Dad?”

I am glad that mother is not in charge of this universe. I am glad that I am not in charge of this universe — or that you are not in charge of this universe. I am glad that Deus Ascendit. I am glad that Christ is in charge. The disciples gazed up into the heavens with a mixture of awe and adoration because Christ ascended.

**BUT THE SECOND THING WE NEED TO SEE HERE WAS THAT THEY WERE JOINED IN ONE COMPANY.**

That was a minor miracle in itself for these sometimes contentious men and women. Somehow their new understanding of their relationship with the ascendant Christ helped them have a new appreciation

of one another. They had a great love for one another — a love that the world simply cannot understand.

There is so much superficial love in our society. One Valentine's Day there was a cartoon in the series "For Better or Worse" in which a mother took her little daughter shopping for Valentine's Day cards. The little girl said to her mother, "Mommy, who makes up all these Valentines?"

The mother said, "Someone who works at the greeting card company. They have a staff of writers who think up hundreds of ways to say 'I love you.'" The little girl looked up and with a child's innocence asked, "Mommy, do they mean it?"

Well, maybe so — maybe not. However, we do know that there was an intense spirit of love and mutual respect among these early disciples. The better they felt about Christ, the better they felt about one another.

On the 29th day of May 1953, Sir Edmund Hillary and his native guide Tenzing Norgay became the very first climbers confirmed to have reached the summit of Mount Everest. In the midst of that historic climb, Hillary slipped, lost his footing and fell into a treacherous crevice. Fortunately, Hillary and Tenzing were tied together by a strong rope. Tenzing, a native of Nepal, pulled Hillary, a New Zealander, inch by inch to safety.

On his return home Hillary spoke of their experience and his debt to his friend. Tenzing was later asked about this event and said simply, "Mountain climbers always help each other." There was a bond that connected them figuratively and literally.

There was a bond that connected the disciples after the ascension — a bond that was stronger than any they had forged over the three years since Jesus began His ministry. Somehow they were beginning to be one body — the body of Christ. They were joined together in one company. Every church would be a better church if its members could be joined together in one company.

There was one thing more that characterized the disciples following the ascension.

THERE WAS A SPIRIT OF ANTICIPATION.

They looked toward the future in a different way. Those two men dressed in white had said to them, "Men of Galilee, 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."

In the account of the ascension in the very last verses of Luke's Gospel, we read that after Jesus had departed from them, the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And why not? They knew that He was coming back. They knew that Jesus had not forsaken them. And so they had tremendous joy. It was the joy of anticipation.

A traveling salesman stopped in to visit a church for the first time in a strange community. He was an emotional kind of fellow and he got carried away during the service. He even let out a little “Amen.”

Several people turned around and looked at him rather sourly. He hung his head as if to say, “I’m sorry.” The lady next to him whispered, “We just don’t do that in our church.”

When the hymns were sung, this guy forgot himself again and sang more loudly than the rest of the congregation combined. Again he could feel people looking at him with disapproval.

After the service, nobody greeted him with much enthusiasm. No one expressed their pleasure that he was there. In fact, they all stood around with what he thought was a pained look on their faces. Finally he came to one member who looked more accessible than the rest and said to him, “I’m sorry to say this, but this isn’t a very warm church. What is it that you folks believe in?”

The man replied grimly, “Oh, we believe in simply doing our duty and bearing our crosses until Christ returns.” The salesman looked at the man’s sour face and said, “Buddy, let me tell you one thing, if Jesus ever has visited this church, He ain’t ever coming back!”

That salesman was a little unkind. Nevertheless, there ought to be more joy in the church than there is anywhere else on earth. Deus Ascendit. God has gone up. Jesus is in charge. We are not forsaken. And one day Christ will return!

The ascension of Christ was an occasion for awe and adoration. It was a time of drawing together as one company. It was a time of great anticipation.

In *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, the Prince becomes close friends with a fox. On one occasion they are trying to set a time for their next visit. It is very important to the fox to know the time of that meeting. They finally agree to meet at 4:00 o’clock. But the little prince cannot understand why it is so important to the fox to know the exact time. Finally the fox replies, “Oh, if you will come at 4:00 then I will begin to be happy at 3:00.”

It is time we start “beginning to be happy.” We have a friend who has gone up and now sits at the right hand of the Father. Deus Ascendit. God has gone up. But like the little fox waiting for his friend the prince to return, we, with joyful expectation, await Christ return! That thought should bring happiness to all our hearts. God bless and amen.

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