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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
1 June 2025

Sermon on Luke 24:44-53

Worship Theme:

JESUS REIGNS OVER EVERYTHING FOR THE BENEFIT OF HIS CHURCH

Jesus' ascension means that his work is complete, in one sense. Never again will a sacrifice for sins need to be made. However, Jesus' ascension also means that, in another sense, his work is just beginning. Jesus now proclaims forgiveness of sins throughout the world; and he does it through the Church, through Christians like us, who are often weak and timid witnesses for Christ. So, Jesus promised to send us his Spirit to give us power from heaven, that we might take the gospel to the ends of the earth. He also ascended into heaven and sat down on the throne of God. He lives and reigns over everything for the benefit of his Church!

Sermon Theme: "Where Is Jesus?"

1. In His Word
2. In His World
3. In His Witnesses
4. In Our Worship

Do you ever wonder where Jesus is? If you do, rest assured that you're not alone. I have, and many other believers throughout history have too. After all, it's easy to see Jesus at times like Christmas and Easter and all the time between those days when he traveled around doing miracles, healing people, and proclaiming the message of forgiveness and salvation in his name. But Ascension? That's a bit more difficult. How do you see someone when they're gone? Every year when we celebrate ascension, we hear words like these – *Jesus left them and was taken up into heaven*. After 3 years of being with the disciples, now suddenly he wasn't anymore. And Jesus' ascension happened 2,000 years ago! He hasn't been physically seen on earth since. So it's a reasonable question – **Where Is Jesus?**

Even the most faithful Christians wrestle with this question from time to time. When we look at the world around us, we see so much tragedy, hardship, pain, fighting, and loss. **Where is Jesus** in that? Of course, we don't have to look across the world to find these stories – we find them right here at home too, in our communities, in our families, even in our own personal lives. Cancer is back for the 4th time and the outcome isn't looking good. A young family member with endless opportunities and their whole life before them loses their life unexpectedly in an accident. A house burns to the ground and it's a total loss. The love of your life walks out on you. You lose your job – again. The addiction you've fought so hard against only digs its claws in deeper. Your mental health is anything but healthy and you don't know how or if you'll ever feel normal again. Money doesn't go nearly as far as it used to and now you're wondering how to provide for yourself and your family. Lies and deceit tear your family apart until you wonder if there will ever be a happy family gathering again. Sin threatens to ruin everything

you hold dear in life, whether your own sin or the sin of others against you. And we could go on and on because there is no shortage of examples of pain, suffering, and loss in our homes and in our lives. And sometimes we want to just look up at the sky and scream out, “**Where are you, Jesus?!**”, because it sure doesn’t look or feel like he’s here in all this mess.

But Jesus’ Ascension is not about him leaving us behind to fend for ourselves in a broken world. Rather, it’s an opportunity for us to see how many ways he keeps his promise to bless us and to always be with us, even if we have a hard time seeing him. Jesus clearly said in Matthew 28, “*Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*” If Jesus says it, God says it, because Jesus is God, and God never breaks any of his promises. So if this is a promise of God which we know he must keep, even after physically ascending and returning to heaven, **Where Is Jesus?**

First, **Jesus is in his Word.** *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.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.* God’s Word is filled with unending, unlimited power. God’s Word very literally changes lives forever. How is that possible? Because in his Word, he tells us all about himself and what he has done for us. Jesus’ disciples had gotten to hear him preach and teach for 3 years – they heard a lot of words from Jesus! But before he physically returned to heaven and they no longer could hear words from Jesus’ physical mouth, he wanted to make sure they knew where they could still find him speaking: his written Word. The Old Testament is filled with God providing for and watching over his people, all while promising them a perfect Savior who would come to free them from bondage to sin, death, and hell. The New Testament is filled with God showing us exactly how he did that – how Jesus is the Savior who fulfilled every promise for us and for our salvation.

Jesus wanted his followers to know and understand all this! *He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name.* (Luke 24) This is the most life-changing message anyone can ever hear. God’s Word is not just a dusty old book you find on your grandma’s coffee table. God’s Word is the way God promises to speak to all people of all time. He doesn’t promise to speak in dreams or visions or other supernatural signs that could so easily be misunderstood or misinterpreted. No, he promises to speak in the same clear words he has spoken through for thousands of years already. This is the way God plants faith in our hearts to trust in him and to receive from him the priceless blessings of forgiveness and everlasting life. He lived, he died, he rose, and we are saved because of him!

And because God wants this message to be heard by everyone, **Jesus is in his world.** *He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.* God does not favor certain people, nor are there any people he does not want. God wants the whole world to hear his Word.

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2) Focus on this for a moment, because it's a huge thought. No matter what people have done or are doing, no matter who they are and where they come from – God wants to save them. This is sometimes a difficult concept for us, because there are many people whom we would probably say “shouldn't be in heaven.” But dear friends, you and I shouldn't be there either. The only reason why you and I are here and why we will someday be in heaven too is because God wanted to save us! It isn't because of anything “good” that we ever thought, said, or did. No, it is simply because of God's perfect unending love for the people of his world. He made us all, he loves us all in Jesus, and therefore he longs to save everyone who still does not know or believe in him yet.

How does he do that? He uses the very people whom he has saved as the people who will go and tell others about him. **Jesus is in his witnesses.** He said to his disciples, “*You are witnesses of these things. 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.*” While those words were certainly intended for his original disciples, they are very much for you and me today too. We did not witness what Jesus did with our physical eyes, but we have read his Word and the Holy Spirit has given us faith to believe that everything Jesus has done for us is absolutely 100% real and true and therefore we want to be witnesses to it by sharing this good news with as many other people as we can! As we proclaim his Word, Jesus gives us the same power of the Spirit that already saved us. This isn't just a “pastor and teacher” thing – it's a Christian thing. We eagerly and joyfully go and tell other people about Jesus, making sure that in our words and actions, people can always clearly see him, because only in him can anyone be saved. And because of him, that's exactly what we are – saved.

What do we do because of all these wonderful things he has done and continues doing for us? This! We do this. We gather together for worship, because **Jesus is in our worship.** We gather to sing and speak our thanks and praise to God for everything we have and everything we are because of him. Jesus' disciples did this too – *they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.* This is such a wonderful and appropriate response to God's grace and mercy for us – we thank him with our thoughts, words, actions, and lives. And here is the most amazing part about worship – God does so much more for us in worship than we ever do for him. He doesn't need our worship, nor can we ever do anything to improve him as God.

But he loves it when we do this, because when we gather together for worship, **Jesus is here!** And wherever Jesus is, blessings always follow.

- When we gather here, **Jesus is in his Word** – we hear it, read it, and sing it every week. And Jesus blesses us through his Word.
- When we gather here, **Jesus is in his world** – this is not the country in which Jesus was born or lived, which means Jesus has spread his Word all around the globe, even here to us. And Jesus continues to bless people throughout his world.

- When we gather here, **Jesus is in his witnesses** – in the pastors and teachers who publicly proclaim his Word, yes, and also in every other believer who gathers, because we all have the privilege of telling each other the amazing things God has done. Jesus blesses us all through all his witnesses.
- And when we gather here, **Jesus is in our worship** – we sing and pray and thank and praise him with our lives, but our worship is so incredibly important because through this time here, Jesus strengthens us and prepares us to go back out into our daily lives, knowing full well that there will be challenges and hardships of many kinds. Yet he guides, guards, and protects us through them all. Even in our thankful response of worship to Jesus, WE are always the ones who leave more blessed.

And so we celebrate Jesus' ascension once again, because this is a wonderful day. Jesus returns to heaven as undeniable proof that his mission to be the Savior of the world is finished. He successfully completed everything God the Father sent him to do, and he returns to his throne in glory with the same body he used to save the human race. Now in heaven, the nail-marked hands and the once-dead-yet-now-resurrected Christ waits for us. He has promised he will return again on the last day in the same way he left, and we so eagerly look forward to that day! In the meantime, the last picture we have of the body of Jesus on earth is one that overcomes any challenge, any hardship, any pain, suffering, or loss, because it's a picture of Jesus blessing us. *When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.* Even when it doesn't seem or feel like it, Jesus' ascension points us to just how incredibly blessed we are by him every moment of our lives. So **Where Is Jesus?** Jesus is right here, always with us, today, tomorrow, and forever! Thank you, Jesus. Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.