

Ascension of the Lord

Luke 24:44-53

May 24, 2020

I am glad we do set aside time to remember those who fell on the field of battle and honor veterans, along with those who belong to Fairfield Grace family.

Thank You, Lee, once again for reminding us of their sacrificial service and our responsibility to remember and honor them as citizens of the United States. Surely we are thankful for them and ask God's blessings upon them and their families.

Intro

Today is Ascension of the Lord Sunday, the last Sunday of the Easter season according to the church calendar. Yes, next Sunday is Pentecost, the first day of the new season, Pentecost season. Jesus came to the world as God incarnate, God who took human flesh. He lived here in this world and died on the cross and three days later was resurrected from the dead and 40 days afterwards, was "carried up into heaven."

Can you imagine Jesus being carried up into heaven? Can you imagine the scene of the Ascension of the Lord? How was he carried up into heaven?

According to Acts, "he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." A cloud did it. The word, cloud in the Bible is used to indicate the presence and power of God. For example, "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way." (Exodus 13:21) The cloud appeared when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. (Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:2-3, Luke 9:28-36) Surely, Jesus' being lifted up to heaven was a mysterious but glorious divine event. It is a part of the God's upper story.

Let me read the verse 51 again:

"While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

One question came to me. Why? Why did the disciples return to Jerusalem with great joy after Jesus' ascension? Why with great joy?

Being separated usually gives us a sense of loss and sadness. Does it not? Isn't it natural we feel sad when one of our beloved ones departs? But look at the disciples. They were full of joy, great joy after Jesus departed from them.

Why?

There are two reasons.

1

Number one: They were full of great joy, because they saw the completion of the work of the Lord at his ascension.

Jesus, the Son of God came from heaven to this world, taking human flesh. He came to live among us, "preaching good news to the poor and proclaiming release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind and setting at liberty those who are oppressed. He also healed the sick and fed the hungry and ate with sinners. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection he delivered us from slavery to sin and death." (UMH pg 9) And forty days after being resurrected, he ascended into heaven. You see, Jesus descended from heaven into the world first and now he ascended from the world into heaven.

His ascension was the last part of his earthly ministry in this world and made its completion. As Jesus says in verse 44, "everything written about Him in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms was fulfilled" as he was carried into heaven. So, his disciples worshipped the Lord and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

2

Another reason they were filled with great joy is because of the promise Jesus gave them before his ascension.

The verse 49 reads, "And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised."

"I am sending upon you what my Father promised." What is it? What is what God promised? What is that Jesus is sending upon us? Jesus said during his farewell

message to his disciples, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth... You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.” (John 14:16-18)

What Jesus is sending upon them is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of the living God. This was why the disciples were full of great joy.

We have been ordered to stay-at-home for more than two months. During these locked-down times, many suffer from cabin fevers. Something, however wonderful have been happening in our lives. We have been calling, texting, emailing our family members and friends more often than before. We have been staying closer to one another ever. Physical distancing does not hinder us from staying in relationship. It rather makes our relationship closer and closer. Does it not?

Likewise, Jesus took physical distancing from us vis ascension but got closer to us by sending the Holy Spirit upon us.

3

When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost, the church has come into being in this world. We understand church as a community of faith. Yes, that is right that church is community of faith. But one step forward, church is a community of faith created and empowered by the Holy Spirit. No Holy Spirit, no church. Church cannot do anything without the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit. Church should not do anything without being led by the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus says, “so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49) Stay here... Wait until you have been clothed with power of the Holy Spirit.” What he is saying to us is that “do not to do anything alone. Do not think you can do anything without the Holy Spirit. You cannot, period.” Do wait until the Holy Spirit melts you, molds you and fills you and uses you. Do wait.

You know this English expression: Jump the gun. It means, “acting before the proper time.” Al often advises me, saying, “Don’t jump the gun, Kun Sam!” Jokingly I say to Al, “I don’t have a gun to jump with me.” Hahaha. What he says, “No rush. Do not go too fast. Hold your horse. Wait for the proper time.” It comes to me this way, “Kun Sam, wait until the Holy Spirit moves.”

Dr Koyama at Union Theological Seminary wrote an article, titled, “God walking 3 miles per year.” God led Hebrew people in the wilderness for 40 years before letting them cross over the Jordan River to the promised land. He indicated that it is only 120 miles to travel if you travel on foot from Egypt to the promised land of New Canaan but as you know, God traveled with Hebrew people for 40 years in the wilderness before letting them cross over to the promised land. Dr Koyama argued that God traveled for 40 years to cover the 120 miles. The speed God traveled at 3 miles per year.

I found the distance between our church building and a new train station in Fairfield downtown is 3 miles. Imagine you get there on foot from the church building one year later on May 24, 2021. How slowly you must travel! Dr. Koyama said, that is the speed of God’s leading work, 3 miles per year on foot.

Aren’t we walking too fast, faster than God in our earthly journey? Don’t we need to “hold our horses and jump the gun?” God’s time is not same as our time. Walking with God requires a lot of patience.

We wonder what God is doing lately in this world, questioning, “What is the Holy Spirit doing in the middle of the pandemic crisis? What changes is the Holy Spirit making at Fairfield Grace? Which way is the Holy Spirit leading us?” We tend to be anxious about our future and want to see all the troubles and problems to be solved as quickly as possible. Don’t we?

Do we trust in God who “is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does” (Psalm 145:13)? Can we say all those changes due to the coronavirus crisis are part of God’s restoring and recreating works in this world for all the living beings, including animals, trees, mountains and oceans?

We trust in God who works in our midst and makes all things for good. Trusting in the Lord is waiting for the Lord, in a sense. Trusting enables us not to jump the gun but to hold our horses. Trusting in God helps to face tomorrow with non-anxiousness and rather with a sense of anticipation to see a new creation taking place in front of our eyes.

Closing

Our closing hymn is “Let there be peace on earth.” It is our commitment to be God’s instrument to bring peace on earth as we observe Memorial Day.

Let me paraphrase this hymn as follows: “Let there be Your spirit on us. Let it begin with us. Let there be the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Let it begin with us. With God our Creator, children all are we. Let us walk with You in perfect harmony. With every step we take, let this be our solemn vow to take each moment and live each moment in Your spirit eternally. Let there be Your spirit in us and let it begin with us.” Amen. Amen.