

Joyful Departure

Luke 24:44 - 54

May 16, 2021

"I tell you. I wish that I had been alive when Jesus was here in this world in the 1st century. Look at those disciples. It could not have been hard for them to believe in Jesus and in God. They had Jesus with them and talked with him face to face. Look at us. It is harder for us because we do not have Jesus; Jesus is with the Father. Consequently, we must believe in Jesus without seeing him. It really is difficult being a Christian. If only we had known Jesus like those disciples did. Yes, then believing in him would not be so difficult!"

Have you ever felt this way? I know that I have.

Today is Ascension of the Lord Sunday when we celebrate his ascending into heaven.

If Jesus had not ascended into heaven, we would still have him among us. That would be great! Right? Look at his disciples once again. They ought to be sad about it because Jesus was not with them anymore. Surprisingly enough, they were neither sad nor disappointed. They were joyful.

The verse 52 and 53 reads, "52And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53and they were continually in the temple blessing God." Yes, you heard it right. They praised and adored him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. Can you see their big joyous faces, singing and praising and blessing God continually?

What is going on? They were happy to see him ascending to heaven. They were happy that he returned to God the Father. Why?

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The ascension is a day of victory for our God. Jesus has conquered everything - sin, death, evil, everything. What a great day! Now he has gone home to be with God. This is a great day of victory, a real homecoming for Jesus. This led them to worship Jesus with joy and continue to bless God. Wow. They saw something we do not see. Didn't they? And since we are Jesus' followers, it is only natural that we should share the joy that the disciples felt when Jesus left them (Luke 24:52); we ought to be joyful with them - happy for Jesus.

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However, there is something else for us to rejoice about today. The ascension is not just a wonderful day for Jesus and God; something great happens to us today as well. There is something that is great and wonderful in it for us.

Let me explain:

Jesus, the Son of God came down to become a man on earth, Jesus. Jesus was understood as God incarnate or God in flesh. Now, the man Jesus returned as the eternal Son of God to God the Father. Can you see what happened? The Son of God came down to live and work as a man on earth and now the man Jesus returned to God the Father.

The Birth of Christ is understood as God becoming a human, Jesus. The Ascension can be understood as human Jesus becoming God by joining God the Father in heaven.

Imagine. When Jesus returned to heaven, as he ascended, he did not throw his body back on the earth. Of course, it was as the Son of God that he returned to the Father, but as the Son of God who is also the man Jesus.

Wow. Wow. Can you see?

God the Father welcoming the man Jesus and becoming one with him? Or the man Jesus joining God the Father and becoming one with God the Father?

Jesus, the Son of God, returned home to the Father to be with the Father forever and ever. Never more to be separated, for they are one. Think about it: the man, the human being named Jesus, has returned to the Father forever and ever, never more to part. It is a mysterious union of God the Father and God the Son as the man Jesus.

From now on, God and Jesus are one; God is one with a man, the man Jesus. The man Jesus, a man in many ways like you and me, is so wrapped up in God that together they are one. This is what the doctrine of the Trinity is really proclaiming.

Pastor Ellingsen said, "God can never really be God unless God is all wrapped up in a human being, because, after all, God and the man Jesus are one. God really cannot be Godself unless God is all wrapped up in people."¹ Wow. God and people are not separable and stay together.

This is why the Ascension is such a great thing for you and me. God is with us and for us. God and we are together. Jesus said, "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." (John 14:12)

“13This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.
15If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.” (1 John 4:13, 15)

God lives in us and we in God. God is immersed in our lives. Yes, God is in our midst. God is with us right here and now. That is what the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to his disciples before ascending to heaven (Luke 24:49), is all about. God is the Holy Spirit among us because God is Immanuel, God with us in our lives.

So we do believe that nothing happened and happening in our lives are all accidents. We do believe God has his hand in all the encounters and all the events in our lives. Indeed, Jesus through the Holy Spirit is in the middle of all the things in our lives.

I am very thankful that I have been here at Fairfield Grace for last 13 years. It is solely by the grace of God. Who is my mother? Who is my brother or sister? Jesus has brought all of us as a part of this wonderful church family joining in love and faith. Thanks to Jesus, I had many fathers and mothers to love and many brothers and sisters to journey together. Our 13 year long life and faith-journey together is God's blessing upon each one of us and all of us.

Last Friday I joined the Rozelle family to bid farewell to Pat, one of us, one of our mothers. She told me about several days before passing on, “Pastor Cho, I look forward to sitting beside still waters.” Yes, she loves the Psalm 23 and had faith in God, the Good Shepherd. I responded her, saying, “Pat, Mom. Know this that sooner or later I will be there joining you. So is Warren.” Yes, we are not alone and God is with us in this life, in death and in life beyond death. Yes, God the Good Shepherd leadeth us beside still waters in this life, in death and in life beyond death.

Last Wednesday, I met Pastor Young Choi, a new pastor to join Fairfield Grace church in July. What a wonderful time we had together. Let me tell you my heart was filled with joy and excitement and thanksgiving after meeting with him. I wish I could stay at Fairfield and serve with him as his partner in ministry.

As soon as he sat down at the picnic table behind the church building, he said, “Pastor Cho. Guess what. My parents told me the other day that your father baptized me.”

Wow. Wow. What is going on? I figured out that he was 1 year old and I 18 years old. So joking I said, “Guess what. I brought a jar of water to the baptismal font when you were ready to be baptized by my father.”

Is it a coincidence? Is it accidental that the one baptized by my father is the one who follows me as a pastor here at Fairfield Grace? No. No. We believe in the work of the

Holy Spirit in our midst. God is at work at Fairfield Grace. God will continue to lead Fairfield Grace and empower Fairfield Grace to do the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ in this community and beyond.

I do have three more Sundays with you. The time to say “Good Bye” comes around the corner. Why me? Why now? Why there? Why not me? Why not now? Why not there? I trust God has a purpose for me to be part of up there in Bristol, CT.

I see Asbury UMC will be the last church to serve before I enter the retirement whenever might be. Yes, the last opportunity to serve with Jesus’ disciples at Asbury UMC. Pray continuously for me, so that I may be used by God there for the transformation of the world. Can I say that I am a missionary to Bristol, CT sent by Fairfield Grace?

Let me wrap up.

The Ascension of the Lord created separation between Jesus and his disciples. But it was not a sad departure. Rather it created a new beginning for his disciples and enabled them to see something new and wonderful, that is, God is not away from them, but in their lives and ministries, breathing with them and working in their midst for the transformation of the world.

Let us open our eyes and see that God is among us and works in our midst.

And let us sing along and dance along with the Lord of dance, who invites us, “Dance, then, wherever you may be: I am the Lord of the Dance”, said he. And I’ll lead you all wherever you may be, and I’ll lead you all in the dance,’ said he.

Hallelujah! Amen!

1. Ellingsen, Larry, his message on www.sermons.com based on Luke 24:44-54