

## 7<sup>th</sup> S of Easter (Ascension Day) 5/12/24

Acts 1:1-11 (NIV84) 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."

In the name of our risen and ascended Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

There are a number of people all over the world who have convinced some of their followers that they are Jesus Christ returned. How do really know for certain if one people of these is not really our Lord and Savior returned to this world or if they are all fakes?

There is certainly no shortage of people who think they are Jesus. It's a fairly common occurrence with those mentally ill with schizophrenia. Various cult leaders like David Koresh, Marshall Applegate, Elizabeth Clair Prophet, Charles Manson and the Rev. Sun Myung Moon convinced their followers that they were Jesus. There are men currently in Puerto Rico, Brazil, Siberia and Australia who have convinced their cults that they are our Lord Jesus returned.

So how do we answer these people who claim to be Jesus? The book of Acts today helps us with that as it answers for us the question of:

- What Is Our Ascended Lord Doing Now?
1. Finishing his work of salvation
  2. Sending us the power of the Holy Spirit
  3. Waiting to return in the same way he left

### 1. After finishing his work of salvation

The book of Acts could have been called **Luke II**, because it is a continuation of Luke's gospel. Both books contain history, however, the content of the gospel is about the life of Jesus, while Acts is the history of the early Christian Church.

The book is written to **Theophilus**, which means **friend of God or God-friend**. It's possible that Theophilus was a real person, but it's perhaps more likely that Luke is simply referring to Christians as friends of God, that Luke was writing so that people like you and I would know the story of Jesus and his church.

So why did Jesus ascend to heaven? Hebrews tells us that Jesus **endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** (Heb 12:2 NIV) Jesus was able to return to heaven because he had completed his work of salvation. At the cross he said exactly that. **It is finished.** Every sin, every wrong that you and I and the other sinners of this world have committed, the blood of Jesus has paid them in full.

Because Jesus did all this for us, Paul tells us: **God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** (Phi 2:9-11 NIV)

## **2. Sending us the power of the Holy Spirit**

So what is Jesus doing now? Jesus taught his disciples that he was returning to heaven so that he could send his Holy Spirit and along with him, the gifts and power that come through him.

**John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.** We normally use the word “baptism” to refer to a very specific act carried out with God’s Word and by God’s command.

Yet the basic meaning of the word is to wash. In the sacrament of baptism, God washes us clean and makes us pure and holy.

On Pentecost, the Twelve disciples were blessed with a very special gift. They were given a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised them: **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.**

The Holy Spirit gave the Twelve the courage to go out into the world and preach Christ crucified fearlessly, even with the threat of prison and death. He also gave them power to speak in tongues and perform many miracles.

We too have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, but not exactly the same as the Twelve. Nevertheless, we have been given power to believe God’s promises and power to go out into the world as people transformed by the Spirit’s working in the Word. We no longer put our trust in money, our wealth or worldly things, but in Jesus, the Savior who became one of us, to rescue us and save us.

## **3. Waiting to return in the same way he left**

So what is Jesus doing now? He’s waiting for the end of the world.

We wait for all kinds of things: the end of school, the start of a job, summer vacation, a wedding, mission festival, a big wedding anniversary celebration, or the birth of a child.

Waiting is hard to do. We’d prefer Jesus to come now, when we want him to come, rather than having to wait. Maybe sometimes we begin to wonder, “Is he ever really going to come?” Or we start wondering if maybe, just maybe, one of those people claiming to be our Savior returned to earth is really telling the truth.

Jesus promised to return in the same way he left: visibly and publicly, not in secret. Scripture tells us that when Jesus returns, Michael the archangel will blow his trumpet and all over the world, the dead will rise from his grave and the angel armies of heaven will be with Jesus. There are other signs too – like the destruction of the sun, moon and earth.

We have not seen any of these things. The dead have not risen. The world has not been destroyed. No armies of angels have suddenly appeared.

We look around us and we realize the simple truth: none of these people who claim to be Jesus are Jesus. They have not fulfilled the words of Jesus about how he would return. The world has not ended. The dead have not risen, armies of angels have not appeared. Jesus will return, just as he left. Until then, we join the ancient prayer of the church: **Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Come quickly! Amen.**