

Sermon: Ascension Day

Text: Luke 24:44-53(v. 50)

Theme: Jesus' blessing is upon us as we minister to His people

Goal: To assure Jesus' power as we share His Word.

Dear Friends in the Ascended Jesus,

Introduction: The image of the ascended Jesus with lifted hands blessing His disciples is not just symbolic of His farewell. It empowers the disciples from then and from now to make sure Jesus' work on earth continues. He went back to the Father, but His task had to have continuity. And the disciples as representatives of the Christian Church of all times were empowered in a very special way by Jesus' blessing.

To bless someone is to wish him all the best and to transfer power from God to the one who is blessed. When God ordained the blessing to Moses, - the blessing we use still now – He said: “So they will put my name on my people and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:27). When Jesus blessed His disciples while He was taken up into heaven, He was empowering them to do the task He had just told them: To go to the entire world and to make disciples of all nations by preaching the Word.

I – To preach repentance

The preaching of the Word begins with the preaching of repentance. The preacher is not merely telling stories or entertaining people. The Law of God must be shown in its entire letters so that the Holy Spirit can convince people that they are lost by themselves, and that no one can obey the Law 100 percent. Only when someone realizes that he cannot please God by his own deeds, that he cannot reach peace

with God by his own efforts, that he is a condemned person, only then the Gospel will make sense. Without the bitterness of the Law people cannot taste the sweetness of the Gospel.

John the Baptist and Jesus Himself began their ministry preaching repentance because the Kingdom of God was near. People had to turn from their selfish and wrong ways because the Messiah was coming; they had to turn to God to be accepted by Him. And many people repented and were baptized.

The same strategy is set by Jesus before He went back to heaven. He said to His disciples: “That is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from dead on the third day, and *repentance...will be preached...*” How can people long for a Saviour if they don't realize that they are lost? This is the task of the Law. We have to preach it and God will empower our words to call people to repentance.

II – To preach forgiveness

To those who repent, forgiveness has to be announced. Jesus said: “That is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from dead on the third day, and *repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name...*” Not all repent, and for them condemnation remains. Jesus was very harsh during His ministry about those who didn't repent, and He was trying to call them back to God. Many refused His preaching. But for those who repent and believe, there is comfort and release. This is the core of the Gospel: To proclaim that there is forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus for those who believe. Therefore, forgiveness of sins has to be preached *“in the name of Jesus”*.

Jesus empowered His disciples to preach and to give forgiveness of sins in His name. As He went back to heaven and we cannot see or

hear Him anymore, His church works and preaches on His behalf. The words of the pastor announcing forgiveness at every absolution are not the simple words of the pastor. It is the Word of Jesus forgiving us! Martin Luther explained this in the Small Catechism: *“I believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, in particular when they excluded openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord deals with us Himself.”*

III – To all nations

And this wonderful message shouldn't be confined to the people of Israel. Jesus' ministry was specific to the people from where He was born from, according to the Old Testament prophecies. But because He had accomplished everything, forgiveness and reconciliation with God should be preached to all nations. Jesus said: “That is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Thanks to God that the disciples were not shy to go all around the world and the Gospel of Jesus reached us as well. The Book of Acts tells us how the apostles reached all the known world of that time; and the Church History tells us how the Gospel went further and further, till nowadays. There are still some areas that have not been reached by the Gospel due to opposition of some regimes and religions. But God's will is that no one shall have the excuse to say that he didn't know and had never heard about the free offering of forgiveness by faith in Jesus. The modern media helps to spread the Gospel to regions where a missionary cannot enter. The mission efforts of the Christian Church will never end till Jesus comes again.

IV – The promise of the Holy Spirit.

But nothing could have been done without the power of the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus before He went back to the Father. He had said to His disciples on the night He was betrayed: “I will not leave you as orphans... I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth” (John 14:18, 16). And Jesus renewed the promise when He blessed His disciples on Ascension Day: “You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father had promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from high.” And this power came from high on Pentecost Day, when the Holy Spirit came in a very special way upon the disciples. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the disciples went to the entire world, preaching repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus.

Conclusion: Ascension Day reminds us that it is our task to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus nowadays. Like in a relay race, the disciples passed the stick to the next generation, and the Gospel has been preached from generation to generation, not only in the churches, but at home as well through the good Christian education done by the parents and grandparents. This is sometimes more effective than the weekly Service, because it is demonstrated and proved daily in words and deeds the hope and love that Jesus pours out on that family. Law is preached and applied when parents reprehend their children; and Gospel is preached and shown when forgiveness is shared among the couple and between parents and children, with love. Ascension Day opens up the heaven to us to see Jesus with His lifted hands blessing us and giving us strength for our Christian task to share His Words to people around us, “beginning in Jerusalem”, this means, beginning at our home, and going to the entire world. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 29 May 2014