

Sermon Luke 24 44 53 Ascension Day

Sermon: Ascension Day

Text: Luke 24:44-53: "Then the disciples worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy!" (v. 52)

Theme: We rejoice in hope!

Goal: Jesus went up to heaven, but He comes back again! We rejoice at His second coming!

Dear Friends in the Ascended Lord,

Introduction: Departure days are usually sad days. Many of us have children abroad, and we know what it means when the time comes to say goodbye when they come to visit us, or when we go to visit them. Two or three days before the date of departure we begin to become sad and concern. Tears come to our eyes at the airport. When will we meet again? - On the other hand, after each of us is settled in our homes again, new plans to meet again fill us with hope and joy, and we become excited when we skype doing new plans... even if it takes one or two years to come together again!

When Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure, they always became sad and raised many questions. But when the day came to go back to the Father's house, "they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy!" Why could they rejoice, even knowing that it would take a long time till they would see Jesus again?

I – Because God's salvation plan was fulfilled

When Jesus was taking during His earthly ministry about His departure, the disciples couldn't understand why it was necessary for Him to suffer and to leave them. When Jesus said, "I am going to my Father's house to prepare a place for you... Thomas said to him: Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:2,5). Doubts were still in their hearts even at the last night they came together before Jesus's death.- Later on that same night Jesus said to them: "Now is your time to grief, but I will see you again"

and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy” (John 16:22). Jesus was talking about the joy of His resurrection, but they didn’t understand it. - When Jesus spoke several times about His suffering, death and resurrection, the disciples didn’t understand it and became desperate when Jesus died on the cross and was laid in the cold tomb.

But “after Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words Jesus had spoken” (John 2:22). “And the disciples were overjoyed when they saw Jesus” on Easter Sunday evening (John 20:20).

The cycle had come to an end. The Son of God came down from heaven to take human’s place in suffering the penalty of sin. And He did it! “It is finished!” (John 19:30) was His cry of victory on the cross! Everything that had to be done to reconcile God with humankind was done. And the Son of God was ready to go back to His Father’s house with His mission accomplished.

But He didn’t go back in the quietness of a night or lonely. He called witnesses. He gathered His disciples and gave them the last tasks: “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. 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, beginning at Jerusalem.

II – Because they were eyewitnesses of this

“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...then he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them as was taken up into heaven.”

Therefore they were able to “return to Jerusalem with great joy!”, even that they wouldn’t see Jesus anymore in this life. They were

now sure about who He is and what He did for them and for all human kind. They were forgiven for all their sins, they were in peace with God, and they were in charge to share this Good News with all and to spread the name of Jesus to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. They were so convinced about this truth that they didn't deny it even facing threats and death. They were faithful eyewitnesses.

But just one detail was missing so that their joy would be complete: "Power from on high", the Holy Spirit. This was accomplished 10 days after Jesus' Ascension, on Pentecost Day, when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles. They were full of joy and proclaimed to all the marvellous deeds of the Lord, preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus.

III – Because Jesus promised to come again

The farewell of Jesus was not forever. He would come back. And this gave them another reason to rejoice, to plan and to dream with the encounter with Jesus again. The two angels who appeared to them while they were watching Jesus ascending to heaven repeated the promise Jesus had given them several times: "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" (Acts 1:11). This message gave them such a hope and joy that they didn't measure efforts to proclaim it to the entire world. "Jesus comes again!" was always part of the message they delivered all over the world, preparing people to be ready, in faith, good standing and blameless before the Lord by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; because repentance and forgiveness of sins is assured to all who believe in Jesus. And this is all we need to meet Jesus again and rejoice with His coming.

It seems that we have lost this perspective of the Christian faith. We believe in Jesus, we receive His forgiveness regularly in the absolution and in the Lord's Supper, we talk about Him, we love each other ... but His return is not expected in such an eagerly way as we expect the arrival of our children to visit us! Maybe the gap between His departure and His second coming is becoming too big, and we

are not expecting Him anymore. Be aware! His promise is true! He comes and we can rejoice with His coming! This hope lifts up our eyes even when we mourn the loss of one of our beloved ones, like as we are mourning the departure of our brother Paul Bohmer. *“Till will meet again, till will meet again”* says one of the Christian songs.

At our last Bible Study we raised the question if we are Easter Christians, who rejoice with the living Christ; or if we are Lent Christian, still mourning and complaining for everything as Jesus is still in the tomb. Our faces and attitudes sometimes show that we are still crossing Lent Season with all its suffering. Let's lift up our eyes and look little further to the empty tomb and to the ascended Christ, *who sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.*

Conclusion: The Psalm for this day is a good example of joy and praise to the ascended and exalted Lord, King over all the earth. Let's read it responsive again and join the psalmist in this nice poem of hope and joy it brings us: *Psalm 47*

P.: Clap your hands, all you nations; / C.: shout to God with cries of joy.

P.: How awesome is the LORD Most High, / C.: the great King over all the earth!

P.: He subdued nations under us, / C.: peoples under our feet.

P.: He chose our inheritance for us, / C.: the pride of Jacob, whom he loved

P.: God has ascended amid shouts of joy, / C.: the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.

P.: Sing praises to God, sing praises; / C.: sing praises to our King, sing praises.

P.: For God is the King of all the earth; / C.: sing to him a psalm of praise.

P.: God reigns over the nations; / C.: God is seated on his holy throne.

P.: The nobles of the nations assemble / C.: as the people of the God of Abraham,

P.: for the kings of the earth belong to God; / C.: he is greatly exalted.

P. + C.: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.