

**Luke 24:44-53**  
Ascension Eve + May 29, 2019  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
Pastor Tim Pauls  
Ascended

Dear hearers in Christ, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Jesus is risen indeed, and this night we hear of Him ascending into heaven; and just before He does so, He speaks to His disciples one last time and sums up His incarnate ministry. He says, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations."

"Thus it is written," He says. He's just shown them that the entire Old Testament – the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms – pointed towards His death and resurrection. The story didn't begin at Christmas: that was just the start of another chapter. The story began long before, before the foundation of the world, and you get your first whiff of the Savior in Genesis 3, when God promised that the Seed of the woman would come and destroy the devil's power. The promise of Jesus is repeated throughout the Old Testament by prophecies and types and foreshadowing, which is why we still rejoice to hear the Old Testament today. It's not outdated news: it's all about Jesus.

There's great comfort in that for us. The birth of Jesus isn't the start of something new. It's not that the Lord got bored or frustrated with His initial plan and decided to try something new with the Incarnation. It's been His plan, His promise, all along. The story of the Old Testament is the story of God patiently enduring the rebellion of sinners because He's promised to save them. He's kept His promise – His faithfulness is beyond question. Be glad: for as He was patient with sinners in order to save back then, He's patient with you in order to save you now.

It was always the plan that Jesus come to save, and it was always the plan that He suffer, die and rise again. The cross isn't God making lemonade out of lemons after Jesus gets ambushed: Jesus' suffering and death are the plan from the beginning. It's all about the expanse of God's love: to save sinners, He sacrifices Himself to suffer the judgment, the death and the hell, for their sin. For your sin. That's what Jesus is doing on the cross: dying for you.

It was always the plan that Jesus rise again on the third day. The disciples don't believe it at first, but there He stands before them, body and all. There's so much to the resurrection. It's the proof that God has accepted the sacrifice for sin, so that you might be forgiven. It's the evidence that Jesus is greater than death, because He conquers the tomb and rises again. Not only that, but it confirms that Jesus is in fact the firstborn from the dead: His resurrection was not just for Him, but He promises, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). Just like His death was for you, His resurrection is for you too – that you might live and never die.

Then He ascends into heaven. That makes sense: His work of redemption is finished – He said so Himself while He was hanging on the cross. Risen again, He's going to His Father, just as He said.

So Jesus ascends into heaven, but the Ascension isn't just His exit. It's for you too. The night before His death, Jesus said to His disciples, "In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also"

(John 14:2-3). Jesus ascends into heaven to prepare a place for you. Note that He ascends into heaven body and all. He doesn't abandon His body or His human nature: He retains them. He remains both God and man. This too is full of good news for you.

For one thing, it's a testimony of how complete is your redemption, how comprehensive His victory over sin. Remember that God created Adam and Eve to live forever, body and all. Sin brought death to Adam and Eve, body and all. To save, Jesus takes on human flesh like them, like you. He lives, He dies, He rises, and He even ascends into heaven, body and all. As Paul confirms in 1 Corinthians 15, you'll be raised up to heaven, body and all. All of this means that sin, death and devil have been utterly defeated: yours is not some cut-rate, half-baked redemption where Jesus manages to free your soul but loses your body in the process. He's redeemed the all of you, and He will raise you up fully restored in body, mind and soul – better than you ever have been.

The Ascension also means you have a place to go. You're not going to die and rise again into a fallen world. The kingdom of heaven is yours.

It also means that, as Hebrews 4:14-16 says, Jesus remains your sympathetic high priest seated at the right hand of God, one who knows weakness and all the attacks of the devil. Far from abandoning His human nature, Jesus remains both man and God; and as your high priest, He intercedes for you in heaven. He's not on a lengthy holiday until His return in glory: Jesus prays for you. This means that you can also pray with confidence, knowing that God the Father delights to hear your prayers – that His throne for you is a throne of grace and gifts, not of wrath and punishment.

Ascended into heaven, Jesus also rules over all things for your good. He's joined you to His death and resurrection in Holy Baptism, so His ascension is yours too. So 1 Thessalonians 4:17 declares that "we will be caught up together with [the saints who have gone before us] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord." The Last Day is Ascension Day for the people of God. It's all good, and it's all for you.

What do we do until then? Jesus sums up the work of His Church in just a few words: "repentance and the forgiveness of sins."

Repent. By the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, turn and change your mind. Turn from sin, from all those things that you do (and think and say) even though you shouldn't; and from all those things that you *don't* do (or think or say) and should. You've been set free from sin by Jesus' own blood. If you continue in sin without repentance, you're saying that you'd rather have the sin than Jesus. That's your call, but your sin didn't die for you, nor has it risen and ascended for you. It only wants to kill you. You can choose sin over Jesus if you want, but you'll never escape the grave and hell.

Repent. By the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, turn from trusting false gods and idols. Keep all that God gives in the proper perspective: money and pleasure and things and places and people can all become objects of worship, misused gifts of God who has given them. But here's the measure: none of those things can die, rise or ascend for you. They might be beloved treasures, but they're terrible redeemers.

Likewise, repent; and by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, turn from trusting in yourself. Your sinful nature wants to convince you that you're good enough, or kind enough, or cute enough to slip into heaven. But when it comes to dying for sin, rising again and ascending into heaven, you're only good for one out of three: you can certainly die for your sin;

and apart from Christ, you will. You can't defeat death and rise again. You can't ascend into heaven, to the glory of the Father.

That's why Jesus has come, to do all of that for you – then to join you to Himself so that you might die, rise and ascend with Him. That's what forgiveness is about: getting rid of all your sin and sinfulness, so that you might be joined to Christ and have eternal life with Him.

That's why, until Jesus comes again, the Church is all about repentance and the forgiveness of sins – both practicing it for ourselves, and proclaiming it to all who will hear. That is why, like the disciples at the end of our text, we gladly continue to worship and bless Him. We do so with more joy: for though He is enthroned in heaven, He is not captive there. He continues to visit in His Word and His sacraments, joining you to Himself, His death, His resurrection *and* His ascension.

With this text, the Gospel of Luke comes to a close. Jesus made His appearance 23 chapters before, the Infant born for you and announced by heavenly messengers who proclaimed peace and goodwill. Ascended into heaven, the Lord remains man as well as God; and rather than angels, He gives to His people the privilege of being His messengers now – and so we proclaim His peace and goodwill to all who will hear. Oh, rejoice greatly! The Lord keeps His promises. His life, death, resurrection and even His ascension are all for you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen