

### **Luke 24:44-53**

<sup>44</sup>Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

<sup>50</sup>Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup>While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup>and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

### **Acts 1:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup>He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said,

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

**Sermon**

This morning we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord. Ascension Day was actually on Thursday 40 days after the Resurrection. But the Ascension can be celebrated the Sunday after, which is what we are doing today.

What do we make of the Ascension? For most it is difficult to understand how our Lord rose bodily into the sky. But we don't need to entirely understand how that could happen. What is important is this. Through Christ, humanity has been glorified. There has been a wondrous change. Christ took on flesh to purge the stain of our sin. That flesh in the end was not discarded but departed this earth and somehow incorporated into God.

An ancient hymn puts it this way:

With awe the angels contemplate  
The wondrous change in man's estate;  
When flesh had sinned, Flesh purged the stain,  
And in that Flesh our God now reigns.

There are many ascension paintings - billowing clouds bearing Jesus up as the sun sets in purples and gold. There is a Roman Catholic Church in Kingsport, Tennessee, which features the ascending Christ suspended above its altar, instead of the usual crucifix. Our focus shifts from the suffering Christ to the glorified and risen Christ.



If you go into the Chapel of the Ascension at Walsingham, a famous shrine in England, what stands out is a couple of feet dangling from the ceiling over the altar. [Show Here](#). It is an arresting image. Some laugh. But there is a very old tradition of depicting the Ascension by showing Jesus's feet going into a cloud. So we are not alone; in fact, we are in good company.



From medieval manuscripts, to the chapel in Walsingham, to Salvador Dali, artists throughout the ages have often depicted this mystery in the life of Jesus, his ascension into heaven, by focusing on his feet. Here are a few:



Public Domain The Ascension by Hans von Kulmbach, German, Nuremberg



**Public Domain The Ascension by Peter-Paul Rubens Flemish 1658**



**Public Domain      The Ascension by-Salvador Dali, 1958**

Our Lord's head and body have passed into the clouds; entered into the realm of the unknown, and what we are left with is the image of his feet: nail-scarred to remind us that this is a body that has overcome the pains of death; very human, real flesh, and yet entering into a mystery that we can neither see nor fully comprehend.

C S Lewis remarks in *Miracles*, that since Heaven is not 'up there', but possibly imagined as being such by a first-century fisherman, when Jesus did actually have his final leavetaking of this Earth in his physical body, the only way the disciples could describe it was by him ascending, regardless of what actually went on.

At the end of the day, what the Ascension *means*, rather than what precisely *occurred* that day, is that Christ returned to the Father, joining heaven and earth...so that he could unite us with our Maker.. interceding on our behalf. This is what matters most, not the mechanics of a miracle.

From our reading in Acts this morning,

<sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said,

**“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?”**

In other words...no point in being frozen - just get on with it!

Jesus ascension is a turning point, a crossroads for the apostles. He must leave them bodily. The Ascension of our Lord is the graduation of Jesus' followers.

Christ's departure has huge consequences for those left behind. This includes you and me and us as a community of faith.

In the Gospel of Luke, after the Ascension, Christ's followers are not called **disciples** any longer; they are called **apostles**. 'Disciple' means 'pupil' or 'learner'. While Jesus was with them, the disciples were Jesus' pupils, learning from him.

After the Ascension, these same followers are called *apostles*...an apostle is **one sent out on a special mission**. They are no longer students, they have graduated. They are missionaries. Jesus sends them to proclaim Repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations, not only to the Jews. Their mission is to share the Good News; the Good News that out of God's enormous love, despite our imperfections, we are forgiven.

Today **we** are the apostles, on the same mission as the originals – to share the Good News. As Christians, we are charged to be his hands and feet, to be his eyes, to be his heart and by so doing, ...to communicate ... that love is the highest law, and that love has forgiven our sins. Amen.