

5.22.22 – Fifth Sunday of Eastertide & Ascension

“Christ Ascends: Now Go Tell the Story!”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 93 (NIV) ~ Pam

- ¹ The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty;
the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength;
indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.
- ² Your throne was established long ago;
you are from all eternity.
- ³ The seas have lifted up, Lord,
the seas have lifted up their voice;
the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.
- ⁴ Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea—
the Lord on high is mighty.
- ⁵ Your statutes, Lord, stand firm;
holiness adorns your house
for endless days.

L: These are Words of Strength from God. C: Thanks be to God!

Luke 24:44-53 (NRSVue) ~ Pam

⁴⁴ 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.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ 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 ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ 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.”

The Ascension of Jesus

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

L: These are Commissioning Words from God! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Father God, we are grateful for our worship this morning. Your words of strength and commission are reassuring yet challenging. We acknowledge your reign here on earth and your sacrificial love for us. We heard the teaching words of Jesus to the disciples, the forgiving words on the cross, the reminder to Mary Magdalene of Christ’s resurrection at the tomb, his breakfast teaching, and more at his after-

resurrection appearances, and now this morning his words of ascension. Help us to rejoice in that reign with you, and then to tell others the story from the Gospels. Be present now as you speak through your messenger. “**Amen.**”

 I’m baaaack! It is so good to be home, and yes, it is important to get away occasionally! I had a wonderful vacation, and thank you to those who dealt with a few “issues” in my absence. I have confidence in you all! The elevator folks and Jeff Potter repaired the old fuses, so we are now in good shape! As we are reminded in Psalm 93, the Lord is still in charge and on his throne.

This psalm was written after Israel’s return from exile in Babylon, where the people had witnessed all types of worship, gods, and pagan practices. The psalmist’s proclamation and reminder that Yahweh was Israel’s King-God became an important ceremony of enthronement, performed at the New Year’s festivals. The Lord establishes his reign on earth in these words, majestic as any royalty and strongly armed as any king’s army. Clothing at that time represented the man and his role in life, so the words “robed in majesty” from verse one are significant word pictures to convey God’s divine, royal status in a relatable way. The **might** of the Lord is greater than the seas (imagine Moses and the Red Sea crossing), and is certainly greater than any other gods they met in Babylon. His holiness and power set him above all other gods (little “g”).

At that time, the temple and its priests represented God’s holiness, yet the temple had been destroyed. This psalm was to encourage the exiles to repair the walls of Jerusalem and rebuild the temple; God would strengthen their efforts, knowing that He is King with all dominion, power, and glory. This holiness and power were and are still witnessed

throughout time and all believers and unbelievers must submit to it and follow his laws (“statutes”).

We know, however, that Jesus came to fulfill the law so the temple, after Christ, would only be a symbol of God’s holiness or for us the place we go to renew and energize our faith; the temple through Jesus is within us now. The psalm does set the tone for Christ’s Ascension and his victory over the world, its chaos of greed, ambition, ego, idols, other gods, and even death itself.

We spent two Sundays since Easter learning about Jesus’ appearances after the cross. Today’s passage is the last appearance to the disciples. According to Luke, Jesus uses Old Testament images and prophecy to prove He is the Messiah: he will suffer unto death, rise from the dead, demand repentance from humankind, and in exchange forgive us from sin. This message had to be preached to all nations, starting with Jerusalem, no matter the danger (*“The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem [Isaiah 2:3^{NIV}”]*)! He was both blessing and commissioning them to go back to Jerusalem and wait until God’s promised power descended on them. He did not describe exactly what that power would be or how it might come to them, but in Luke 24:49 and John 14:26 he promises *Dunamis* from God (Ancient Greek = *δύναμις*), an ancient Greek philosophical concept meaning "power", "potential" or "ability" (this is where we get the words dynamic and dynamite). We know from hindsight and will know in two weeks on June 5th that the Holy Spirit’s power will descend upon the disciples at Pentecost (50 days after the resurrection).

The disciples may not have understood the prophetic writings while Jesus was alive, so the risen Lord “opened their minds” to God’s Word and the divine possibility of saving humankind. That prophesied salvation comes from the Advocate, Counselor, or Comforter who Jesus promised to send – we know as the Holy Spirit. For the writer Luke and for us today, the Holy Spirit empowers the church’s mission in the world, and those who carry it out. It’s a little like the school graduations going on now [*by the way, please call the office with your family’s graduates names and information!*]. There is great joy and excitement of fulfilling the earned degree and all the work that goes with it (as was there joy and excitement at seeing Jesus again after death!), yet the question remains what to do with the degree. How will God use this graduate and education to influence the world? Jesus speaks through the disciples’ joy at seeing him to challenge and commission them to **continue the work** he has begun. The Ascension is not the ending point any more than Graduation is! It is simply the beginning of the work!

He says wait for the power of the Holy Spirit – wait to receive the potential, power, and supernatural ability to share the gospel message with all nations; then go tell others what you witnessed and share your testimony that Jesus saves and will come again.

Earlier this year, we studied in the book of James that faith alone is not enough. As Baptists and disciples of Jesus, it is our duty to share the Gospel message in both word and deed. It might be a note, a meal conversation, or just a quick sentence or two in gratitude for someone’s service that conveys God’s love and desire for relationship with a person. On my trip, as I left the plane, I thanked the flight attendants for their

work, and their reactions were amazing. People say thanks all the time, but my eye contact and mention of their vocation to serve others in difficult overcrowded planes was understood and appreciated. Their surprised expressions revealed the underlying stress of their work. They exhaled and perhaps allowed Jesus' love through me to be experienced. I was truly grateful for them, and had been praying for them during the flight. There were no outbursts or unruly passengers, but timetables and safety during a pandemic still create stress. In my opinion, Flight Attendants must have the spiritual gift of hospitality, or simply could not do their jobs well. Sometimes actions are a clearer message of God's benevolent love, and we need both words and service to others. If your spiritual gift is evangelism, by all means speak the truth in love to any who don't yet know Jesus. If your spiritual gift is service, generosity, teaching, or hospitality, listen for that work that we can offer to the community or neighborhood and tell me about your insights. If you're already doing this, then good for you! You are acting out the Scriptures of today, showing that God is still King and Christ is still Savior. And although Jesus is not physically walking the earth and is with his Father God in heaven, the work is still to be done here on earth, and we are to be his hands and feet. I implore you to "Listen for the Work" our church is equipped to do now and in the near future, and the work you personally have been empowered to do. This *dunamis* is what attracts people to the church today, not obligation or curiosity, but holiness, truth, God's power, and service to others. How can we serve and how can we share the testimony of this great Lord and Savior? Through you, others will see Jesus! **Amen.** //

Will you pray with me? Powerful Lord, we are grateful for your incarnate Son, Jesus, his life, death, resurrection, appearances, intercession, and ascension. We thank you for these Scriptures to show us how powerful and necessary you still are! Help others to see you in us as we go about our days and evenings. Give us patience to wait on your power, discipline to follow your instruction, and then put us to work serving others and sharing the Gospel. **Amen.**