

Ephesians 1:15-23

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, **you may know what is the hope to which he has called you**, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Luke 24:44-53

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

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

Sermon

Today is the Sunday we celebrate the ascension of Christ, his going up into heaven and this can be a challenging Sunday to wrap our heads around. What does it mean that Jesus ascended into heaven? Why does it matter, what is its significance. At the very basic level, it means that the risen Lord is no longer walking on earth. That Jesus is no longer physically present in the world but instead that he is in heaven. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father which means he is the crowned prince, or in trinitarian language, he is King of kings and Lord of lords. He reigns over all of creation as God. Another understanding of Christ's need for ascension is that he goes ahead of us so that he might prepare the way and prepare a place for us. This is the good news of God's willingness to be where we are and to go where we go. Connected to our birth, our life and our death - God became flesh and dwelt among us so that we might better know God. Jesus took on mortal life and that, through him, all life might be redeemed. In Christ's death God endures the fullest outcome of our mortal sin. In Christ's resurrection, God overcomes death and sin and thus opens the door for our own salvation and a hope for eternal life. So then, in Christ ascension we have the doors to heaven opened to us as well.

But for there is a more practical meaning to Christ's ascension for us, and that is the simple fact that Jesus is no longer physically here to lead the church. For thirty-three years of life and at least three years of active ministry, Jesus has been the physical manifestation of God's love and glory. This love and majesty has been seen in the ways that he healed the blind and lepers, in the way that he associated with sinners and tax collectors and all sorts of outcasts, and he associated with the religious leaders of his time. Jesus exhibited God's love and glory in his teachings of scripture, sharing messages of hope and radical reconciliation and societal change that turned people around and showed that God's love was active and would overcome all evil in the world. This message was made manifest in Christ's willingness to endure death and in his being raised from the dead. All this time, Jesus was the central figure, the rabbi, the prophet, the savior. But now, he is no longer physically here to lead us, at least not in the same way.

But I believe this was always God's plan for the world. Christ was not just sent to teach and lead disciples to know God and to serve God. Christ was sent to begin a movement that would change the world. And like any great movement, the leaders had to take ownership. So Jesus steps out and asks his disciples to step up. Jesus ascends and we are called to continue his ministry and be his physical body in the world.

Raise your hand if you could use a little hope! Could you use a bit of encouragement and joy? Could you handle hearing good news instead of broken rhetoric or stories of death? Paul writes to the church in Ephesus and encourages them in these words, "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, **you may know what is the hope to which he has called you...**" that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

Where is the hope in the world, where is the hope in our midst? Let me tell you, hope is all around us. But the tricky part about hope is that it is often missed because we don't name it, even when we see it.

So I want you to name it, name where there is hope in your life. Maybe it is a person's name, maybe it is a ministry that you are a part of or that you see. Maybe hope is good news or it is in new opportunities. I want you to name hope, write it down, use the bulletin, use a pew envelope, write it on your hand if you need to.

As you think about it, let me share some of where I see hope. Today, on Mother's Day, moms who are escaping abusive relationships at Sheltering Wings are also receiving gifts of love and care from our congregation. I see hope when I see the volunteers of White Lick who serve a meal for the men at Good News Ministry and those who share clothing for the homeless through Indy Love Train. I see hope when 25 or more folks find strength and comfort and direction, not on Sunday morning but on Thursday evening. The amazing ministry of our PAL group that seeks to strengthen, inform, and walk with parents who have children or loved ones who are struggling with the disease of addiction.

I see hope in the individuals and groups who build up our congregation from the inside, through hours of painting, mowing, gardening, working in the kitchen, sharing prayers and sermons with our shut-ins. There is so much hope that we offer through our congregation, it is wonderful. Christ ascends to heaven, but before he does he calls us to be his witness to the repentance and forgiveness and love of God. So where do you see hope? Will you be a witness of that hope by sharing it with others, today. Thanks be to God for the hope we find in the Body of Christ. Amen