

**Text: Luke 24:44-53**

*"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." 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 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." 50 When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. 52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God."*

Most of us are familiar with life insurance. Life insurance is something that we buy which will supply some degree of financial security to loved ones and dependents in the event that the insured person would die. That doesn't mean that the person purchasing life insurance is planning to die soon. It simply means that we all recognize that sooner or later we are going to leave this life. The nice thing about life insurance is that it can provide at least a little bit of financial assurance and security to the people who are beneficiaries -- the ones who could potentially be left behind.

That description of life insurance reminds me a little bit of what happened on the hill outside Jerusalem forty days after the first Easter. Jesus' disciples had no idea and no wish for their Savior to go away again. They had come close to losing him when He was crucified, but now He had risen and would be with them -- or at least that's what they thought. Jesus, as the all-knowing God, knew that there was the danger of these followers being devastated again. So before He left -- even as He left -- He worked hard to prepare their hearts and minds for the amazing things ahead of them.

In the Gospel for the Ascension of our Lord, we get some insight into that special time. Today we hear that:

**The Ascended Christ Assures His Followers.**

- 1. He has completed their salvation.**
- 2. He will send them His Holy Spirit.**
- 3. He will visibly return to take them to heaven.**

**1. He has completed their salvation.**

From Maundy Thursday until the day of Jesus ascension things had been so hectic that it was hard for the disciples to keep a focus on Jesus' mission to fulfill God's purpose. That purpose was already stated in Eden when Adam and Eve couldn't say no. After the fiasco, which cost them God's image, God spoke to the Devil, but indirectly to Adam and Eve. *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* (Genesis 3:15) That offspring of the woman would come in the person of Jesus to fulfill God's will. St. Paul summarized it in this way. *"God our Savior . . . wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."* (1 Timothy 2:3-4) Jesus came to *" . . . live under law to redeem those under the law so that you might receive the full rights of sons."* (Gal. 4:4,5) And Jesus willingly carried out that will of God by going to Calvary's cross. Because of his sacrifice, John pictured him as *"the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29)

In the Gospel for today, Jesus very eloquently summarized His work. *"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."* (Luke 24:44) It was no accident that Jesus' life turned out the way it did. His life, death and resurrection fulfilled God's plan as recorded in the Bible. Luke writes, *"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,"* (Luke 24:45-46) Each year during Lent and especially on Good Friday we review the Scriptures that talk about Jesus' suffering and death. I'm sure Jesus' words to his disciple on this day included familiar words from Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22. But these were no longer just words. Jesus lived according to God's rules perfectly, then went to the cross to suffer innocently until He was able to cry out, **"It is finished!"** Everything necessary for their salvation was accomplished.

So the first **Assurance of the Ascending Lord to His Followers** was the assurance **that He had completed their salvation**. He was going back to heaven because His part of the work was over. His return trip was a triumphant procession that displayed an accomplished mission on behalf of God's people. But the **assurances** left his disciples just that much better equipped to carry out their part of the mission. Jesus' ascension assured his disciples then and now that we have a message of victory and of "mission accomplished" to proclaim. So often people view Gospel ministry as a complicated explanation of a convoluted plan. In reality, it is simply to proclaim that when Jesus said, "*It is finished,*" he was declaring that our ticket to heaven has been purchased and that our accommodations await our arrival.

But despite the greatness of the day, there were still tough times ahead for the disciples. And they needed all the help they could get. So **their ascending Lord gave them another assurance. He assured them that He would send them His Holy Spirit.**

## **2. He will send them His Holy Spirit.**

The commissioning words that Jesus gave before he left were breath-taking. He said, "*. . . repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things.*" (Luke 24:47-48) In his other account of Jesus' ascension, in the Book of Acts, Luke records Jesus' words just a little differently and more clearly. "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8) Other passages of Scripture flesh out God's plan. Matthew records Jesus' commission this way. "*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20) And Mark recalls still other words. "*He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."* (Mark 16:15-16)

Each year I like to go to Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary to attend the assignment of the graduating class to their first fields of service. Imagine that I invited you to go along, and as they were reading the list, you suddenly heard your name and behind it, an assignment into the pastoral ministry. How would you feel? You'd probably say, "There must be some mistake." Right? I can't do that! I haven't graduated from the seminary. But you probably would know how Jesus' disciples felt on the first Ascension Day. It was a formidable and scary task Jesus was giving them. How much easier for them to be like the ostrich and stick their head in the sand.

If your name were read to take a pastor assignment, you might be right to say, "I'm not prepared for that." But you couldn't say -- and neither could Jesus' disciples -- that you are unequipped for Gospel ministry. He didn't just say, "Hit the streets." He promised them the Holy Spirit. "*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.*" (Luke 24:49) And we know that they believed the promise even if they didn't fully understand it. The last verse of the Gospel says "*And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.*" (Luke 24:53) Whatever the disciples might have been lacking before Pentecost would be dealt with then. And God promises to send his Holy Spirit to us as well.

So **the ascending Lord assured his followers that He had completed their salvation** and that **he would send them the Holy Spirit**. But there was one more assurance that He added to keep them sharp and to stress the urgency of their work. He also assured them **that He will return visibly to take them to heaven.**

## **3. He will visibly return to take them to heaven.**

Were you ever in one of those situations where everything sounded good and all of your questions were answered and all of your concerns were addressed, but you still had a bad feeling in your stomach about it? Well that's probably what the disciples were going through. They understood **why** Jesus had to go to heaven. John later wrote, "*My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*" (1 John 2:1) St. Paul said to the Ephesians: "*. . . [God] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that*

can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." (Ephesians 1:20-23) It was great to know **where** Jesus was going and **what** He would be doing for them, but it still left a gaping hole in their lives.

So **Jesus promised to return** -- on his timetable. He'd actually done this before Ascension Day. He earlier said, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."* (John 14:1-4) And He added urgency when he said, *"As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work."* (John 9:4)

So now as Jesus was taken from the disciples into heaven there was a calming assurance that they indeed would see him again under very favorable conditions. It was an assurance that gave the disciples the boldness to proclaim Jesus even to the point of death. It was an assurance that gave them confidence to preach Jesus' name even when forbidden to do so by the authorities. And, best of all, it gave them the faith to declare that at life's end they would again see Jesus. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote, *"Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."* (2 Timothy 4:8)

And the same **ascended Lord gives assurances to his disciples** in the year 2016. The fact that Jesus is in heaven reminds us **that He has completed our salvation**. The progress of the Gospel ministry for almost 2000 years gives us **assurance that He has sent His Holy Spirit**. And the numerous promises of the Bible **assure us that Jesus will visibly return to take us to heaven**. Better than any life insurance policy that money can buy, Jesus' ascension gives us the sure hope of eternal security at His side in heaven. As the hymn writer put it, **"On Christ's ascension I now build the hope of my ascension."** May this confidence be with us every day of our life.

**Amen.**