

*Acts 1:1-11* The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, <sup>3</sup> to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; <sup>5</sup> "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." <sup>6</sup> Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. <sup>8</sup> "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." <sup>9</sup> Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, <sup>11</sup> who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

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I can still remember as I child when my best friend moved far, far away. I knew that I would never see him again. I couldn't believe he was leaving. We were inseparable and now he was gone. What would life without Eric walking around be like I wondered?

I suppose the disciples must have had similar feelings as they watched Jesus ascend into heaven. Their Lord Jesus was going far, far away. They probably couldn't believe He was leaving. After all, the eleven of them and Jesus were inseparable. They did everything together. They must have wondered, "What would life without Jesus walking around be like?"

And while this question ran through their head, they thankfully also had the words of Jesus to answer this question. Jesus had told them what life without Jesus walking around would be like. To be precise, Jesus explained to them two things to them that would help answer that question; an angel uttered a third.

The first thing that Jesus told them right before He left for heaven was that while they would be left behind, they would not be left alone. He instructed them to wait in Jerusalem until the gift from the Father arrived. He promised them that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Jesus told them that when this One came they would receive understanding, and be able to do everything that they were called to do.

The second thing Jesus told them before He left was this: He told them what they were to do once He left. Jesus. In Jesus words, they were to be His witnesses. They were not only to spread the Word to those close, but to all Jerusalem, then Samaria, and then to the end of the world. This mission would fill their days and nights. And although Jesus would not accompany them in physical bodily form on this mission, they needed not fear. The Holy Spirit would give them everything they needed to accomplish this daunting task of taking the message of repentance and Baptism unto salvation to the whole world.

As Jesus began to ascend, an angel told them one last important truth. He told them that while Jesus indeed had physically left them, He would also physically return to gather them together. They were called to ever live the hope of Jesus' return.

So, what would life without Jesus walking around be like for the disciples? It would be Spirit-filled. It would be witness-driven. It would be hope-sustained.

Every step the disciples had to take would be taken with the constant wisdom, counsel, and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Those steps they took would not be in vain, but would be the very way in which the world would come to hear of its Savior. And as they walked, they would keep one eye on the skies waiting for their Lord's return. This is what life without Jesus walking around would be like: Spirit-filled, witness driven, hope-sustained.

For these disciples living without Jesus walking around would indeed be a change. For the last three years they had done nearly everything with Him. They ate their meals together. They attended the synagogue together. They traveled together. And now all that would change. They would enter into a completely different phase of their lives.

The situation is quite different for us. Each of us was born into a time where Jesus was already far, far away, ascended to the right hand of God. We don't have any first hand experience to know what life with Jesus walking around was like. But still, the question that we must ask today is really the same question the disciples on Ascension Day asked. What is life without Jesus walking around supposed to be like?

I suppose it is no great surprise that the answer is the exact same answer that the Disciples had revealed to them by Jesus and the angel. Our lives without Jesus are also to be Spirit-filled, witness-driven, hope-sustained.

The disciples received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost which we will celebrate next Sunday. And while none of us were there that first Pentecost day, we have each received the same Spirit that the Disciples received there. Each of us received the gift of the Holy Spirit from our Father on the day that He adopted us into His family. From the day of our baptisms on, our lives have been Spirit-filled. We go about all of the tasks to which God has called us to each day with the constant wisdom, counsel, and comfort of the Holy Spirit. He is the one that transforms our ordinary lives into exciting ways in which God works all of His gracious work in this world.

Our lives also are to be witness-driven. We are to be driven by the opportunity to share Jesus with our peers. It should be said that there are two important differences between what it meant for the Apostles to be witness-driven and what it means for most of you to be witness-driven. First none of you, at least so far, have been called into full-time ministry like the Apostles. But that does not mean that your lives are still not to be driven by the opportunity to witness the faith that lies within you. Indeed, no matter what our calling, we are exhorted to always be ready to share the reason for the hope we have. We are always to be ready to talk about Jesus. For the Disciples it was their job, their vocation, their calling. For you, it is something that should penetrate every part of your life including your job, your vocation, your calling. The second difference is that the disciples were called to Jerusalem, then Samaria, and then to the entire world. All of us are called to Ellsworth, then Kansas, and then to the entire world. We start where we are and work our way out until the whole world has heard. The terrain for us and the disciples is much different but the situation is not. All around them and all around us live many, many people without the forgiveness and peace of Jesus. And we are called to take them the message of Jesus that they might believe and be baptized.

Lastly, we too are to be hope-sustained. We too are called to live with one eye on the skies. It was the disciples who saw Jesus leave and go to heaven. Perhaps it will be us who will see Him return in the same way. Indeed, our Lord may return any day. And when He does, we will rejoice. But until He comes, we will be sustained even through trial and tribulation knowing that the promise of His return is certain. He will come to restore all things and gather His people together forever.

Each time we gather at the table to receive Christ's body and blood from His altar, we gather in this hope that sustains us. For we know that the peace and forgiveness offered at the Altar is just a taste of the feast that will be served on the day the Lord returns just as He left. The Lord's Supper in this way keeps our eyes focused on the skies. And that is very important, for the hope of our salvation coming to its completion is what keeps us going day after day. The assurance of life eternal is what gives hope to those of us stuck in life temporal.

Indeed our lives like the disciples are to be Spirit-filled, witness-driven, hope-sustained. This is what life without Jesus walking around should look like. As you examine your own life this day, you are called along with me to examine if our lives without Jesus walking around look as they should. Are they Spirit-filled, witness-driven, and hope-sustained? If not, we must realize that the problem is not with God, but us. If our lives are not as they should be, it is because our sinful desires have taken the place of the holy desires which God through His Spirit wishes to work in us. Perhaps we have become hate-filled, success-driven, and security-sustained. Perhaps we have become passion-filled, business-driven, and money-sustained. Perhaps we have become knowledge-filled, approval-driven, and distraction-sustained.

Whatever the case in your life and mine, today again we must admit to our God that our lives have not always been as they should be. And as we do, we give thanks to God for this Ascension Day. For since Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father, when we confess our sins, we can know that our dear Jesus intercedes on our behalf. He reminds His father that it was for sins like these that He died and rose. And as our Savior intercedes, our Father forgives us and renews in us life as it should be.

And because He forgives and renews us, our lives without Jesus walking around are the same for us as the disciples. Our lives like theirs by His grace are indeed Spirit-filled, witness-driven, and hope-sustained. Amen.