

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"The New Power"
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Ascension of our Lord

This spring we seem to be experiencing more warmth. The plants are weeks ahead of schedule in the garden. The sun has been shining. Many of us have been outside lately, and we are very grateful.

The power of the Spring is one of new hope. Just as the sun rises everyday to remind us of God's mercies being new everyday, so does Spring remind us that God's power is there to make the earth alive again in a way that does not happen in the winter. The power of Easter is often entwined with Spring. Of course Jesus' power does not depend on the weather patterns, which is good. Spring is not exactly a black and white fact in Newfoundland. Some years we appear to forego Spring and simply go into Summer such as it is.

So when we hear of the hope connected to Spring, we dare not hope too much lest we be disappointed again in the weather. Or worse than that, someone again said that if we do have a lovely Spring and Summer, than we will pay for it in winter. I wonder if this line of thinking is taught in the schools because I hear it so often.

Well, the weather is not what lifted the Lord Jesus Christ from the place he as standing, speaking his final words to the original eleven disciples during his ascension. His ascension was not dependent on the thermals of the jet stream. He rose up to show again that he was who he said he was. He wants to rise in each of our lives to a higher and higher place. That is the essential message of the Ascension.

Part of Jesus rising in our lives is giving our children to God. We do so in the covenant community of the Reformed Church with water baptism. Susan and Godfrey have given their second daughter to the Lord and who knows how much she will see in her life time. We agree with this family that it is good for the Lord to become greater with their children and with all four of them. We bless their desire to honor the Lord Jesus Christ in their home and with their lives' ambitions.

We too give ourselves back to the Lord and remember our own baptisms even though most of us cannot remember them. We know we were given to God by grace. We know we continue to trust God by grace. We realize how many have chosen other routes in these days. We know how the church and Christian faith has diminished culturally here and across N. America. Yet no matter what the culture decides about Jesus Christ, we can continue to choose to follow him and his ways.

Luke in the first chapter of his account of the continuing acts of the new faith community, led by the apostles, notes that we all are encouraged to be God-lovers; that is the meaning of the name Theophilus. So whether he was writing this book to a certain man named Theophilus or whether he was writing to all of us who desire to love God more, we can know that Jesus wants to have a higher place in our lives. What does that higher place look like?

Higher ground and a higher perspective help us physically to see where we live and to know where we are on a hike or an outdoor adventure. God gives us greater perspective when we ask God to show us how he is looking at our lives, our choices with our time, our choices with our money, our choices in our relationships. When we have enough quiet in our lives to simply pause and ask God what he thinks. I believe we receive answers. I believe as we continue to choose to read Scripture, his voice clearly is heard there. I believe that we need the church and the church community to make sure we are hearing God well and appropriately.

Jesus knew that. He knows that we need help to get God's point of view at our work place, in our homes, at our schools, in our recreation, wherever we are. That's in part why he left us to be with us in the new power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who directs us to God's perspective. The Holy Spirit guides us as we desire to be guided as we desire to listen. The problem is that we often don't take the time to listen. It takes the crisis to slow us down, to allow us to stoop down low enough to hear God.

Why did God promise us not only water baptism but also the presence, power and guidance of the Holy Spirit? What do we learn in this first chapter of Acts and also looking forward to Pentecost next week, the second chapter of Acts? We learn that the main point of the presence of the Holy Spirit is to not only keep us in relationship with God, but also to keep us focused on our mission. For some reason we tend to be distracted from our

mission. Remember the devil is the lord of the flies (Beelzebub), and the flies distract us. Even before we come into the fullness of the insect season, we know the devil wants to take us away from the blessings and the healings and the power of our relationship with God. If he distracts us, then all we have are good intentions of things we might have done.

So the Holy Spirit is the opposite spirit to the devil. He wants us to have enough quiet in our lives to listen to God, to put God's mission first in our lives. What is that mission? In the simplest of terms and in the shortest of sound bytes, I'd say, "Telling others about what our relationship with God is like." Now in order to do this we need to be able to verbalize what that relationship is like.

That was the beauty of the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Not only were Christians telling about how they were loved by God, how their sins were no longer held against them, how they enjoyed a foretaste of heaven by loving Jesus and his ways practically and daily, they were also able to speak in languages they had never learned so that people who came would know that these were not just stories but God was at work through them. That was the original purpose of the gift of tongues at the day of Pentecost. It was a supernatural reversal of the Tower of Babel, where no one could cooperate or understand each other because their languages were multiplied. Now God was multiplying the language abilities to spread the Word so there would be no language barrier to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Today I believe the same thing is happening around the world. There are those scholars and linguists who are bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to cultures and languages who have never heard the Gospel. There are also reports of supernatural occurrences of the gospel being proclaimed in unknown languages, getting through videos and DVDs and people sharing in countries where they are not free to share. Thus the Word is proclaimed.

For us, the simple question is do we desire this power of the Holy Spirit more and more in our lives? Where we do God does amazing work. Where we resist God still does amazing work, but we don't see it. In fact, we can become hardened to what God is doing if we are not open to listening to God. And if we are not listening, or don't want to listen, then it is unlikely we will be the kind of witnesses God wants to use. But where we say "yes" to God, he gives us words and gives us time to share about the centrality of Jesus Christ in our lives.

You might say, I don't share about my faith. I let my actions speak for themselves. And it is good to have actions in line with your faith. But I believe we must prepare ourselves to give an account for the hope that we have within us. This is 1 Peter 3:15 which reads:

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

Such an answer is attractive, not defensive, not bitter, quieter rather than argumentative, but clear. And you may say, "That's fine for you, preacher, but I just don't do that. I keep my faith private." But our relationship with God was never meant to be kept private. Sure there are those who will try to put you down because you believe. There are those who will try to tell you that you cannot be a rational, educated, balanced person and be a follower of Jesus.

The reality is that following the Creator of the universe makes all the sense in the world. The world and reality in which we live is not random, nor a fluke. We choose to point to the God who made us, was revealed in Jesus Christ and made clear through the power of the Holy Spirit. When we point to this One, we continue the work of the Ascension and the day of Pentecost.

Let us fulfill our mission with expectation and hope.

Let us pray.