Ascension Sunday is probably not the most celebrated festive day on the Christian calendar, especially among the Protestant churches, however it does bear deep significance in terms of our faith foundation, as well as of the early church. The Ascension of Christ is both a time of rejoice, as well as sadness, as we bid farewell to Christ physically for the 2nd time. It was sort of like a “home going” party for Jesus, as He returned to His Heavenly Father.

Although it may not be as well celebrated, the ascension event was well documented every time we recite the *Apostles’ Creed*, as we profess that Christ “*on the third day, rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”*

Right before he bid his farewell to his disciples, Jesus promised to them that *“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”[[1]](#footnote-1)* Soon the Father will be sending us an advocate – the Holy Spirit, the 3rd person of the Holy Trinity to be among us. Bear in mind that the Spirit is here NOT as a replacement of Jesus, but more of a supplement to the work that Jesus had begun and continues. Moreover, it was also God’s plan that WE (the people) would take a greater role in participating in the work of establishing God’s kingdom, here on earth as well as it is in heaven.

But how? How are we able to do what Jesus has done? We’re not Jesus. We don’t have the supernatural power to perform miracles, heal the sick, and cast out demons…etc. At least NOT YET! But soon God will send the Holy Spirit upon us. And that the Spirit would empower us to do things that are beyond our human imagination.

As Jesus proclaimed, “***You will receive power*** *when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

The disciples and the other followers must had been all confused, scratching their heads, staring at each other and looking up towards heaven wondering what was happening and what was going to happen to them next?[[3]](#footnote-3) Suddenly two men dressed in white robes appeared before them saying, “*Men of Galilee,* ***why do you stand looking up towards heaven?*** *This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

Now, let us pause here for a moment. Doesn’t this scene of the ascension seem awfully familiar? Haven’t we seen this or heard this conversation before on the morning of the first Easter, when the women came to the empty tomb looking for Jesus, only to be disappointed by what they couldn’t find. In the same way, two men also dressed in white robes appeared before them saying, *"****Women, why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen.****[[5]](#footnote-5)*I believe this was intentional on the gospel writer Luke’s part in order to draw the comparison between these two significant events.

 Both the ascension and resurrection events signified that even though Jesus is no longer physically with us, the Spirit of God is alive and living among us today and wherever we may be. And that **our faith shall no longer be dependent by what we see or touch, but instead it shall be empowered by what we believe and convict in our hearts.**

Afterall, it was only 40 days ago that their spiritual leader was gruesomely murdered. Many of the disciples were still living in great fear while trying to stay low-profile, if at all possible. A number of disciples, including Peter, even went back to their previous profession and lifestyle. They had gone back to the fishing village.[[6]](#footnote-6) How soon had they forgotten what Jesus had instructed them, of what they were commissioned and called to do. Perhaps they weren’t paying attention when Jesus told them that, or maybe they were simply clueless. But that’s not what God had installed for these disciples. God had a much grander plan for them, even after Jesus was no longer with them. The mission of God continues!

After those disciples witnessed the ascension of Christ in Bethany, they returned to Jerusalem. They were unafraid but instead they worshipped God and praised God joyfully[[7]](#footnote-7) probably back into their secret locations. They devoted themselves to constant prayer and fellowship. They didn’t skip a beat, even though their lives might still be endangered. Whatever happens, they recommitted their lives in sticking together. No more going back to fishing, no more fear of authorities, and no more secret hiding in public [views].[[8]](#footnote-8) This was a pivotal and transformational moment in their lives and it was about to get better.

What the ascension of Christ posed for the early disciples then, also apply for us now today. Christ presented to us a new challenge - how we may keep our lives and our faith centered on God, as we strive to engage our lives in full participation of God’s mission here on earth. As Luke tells us that through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ has commissioned us *to be His witnesses – in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.[[9]](#footnote-9)*

But what does that mean exactly? What does it mean to be a witness for Christ? This seems like an abstract concept rather than a practical action plan. You notice, Jesus didn’t really lay out the full detail of what he meant by that. Jesus wanted to let the disciples figure that out on their own…well, sort of.

Or perhaps Christ intentionally left it this way because it would be different for different people, based upon one’s context and giftedness of faith, in accordance to their callings. **To be Christ’s witnesses** **means that we surrender our lives to God and to be God’s ambassadors, as the Apostle Paul put it** - not afraid to speak the truth, to share the stories of our faith and our experiences with others.

**To be Christ’s witnesses means that we would exercise all of our gifts and talents in order to advance God’s kingdom, on this side of heaven**. Instead of staring at one another or up to the sky like the disciples, we are being prompted into actions (in our various contexts) as let by the Holy Spirit. We ought to be looking out for others, gauging the needs of our community and our neighbors, extending God’s grace, peace, compassion, and love to others, while carrying out God’s mandate to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God*.[[10]](#footnote-10)* That’s what being Christ’s witnesses and taking part of God’s mission on this earth all about.

Instead of looking for God to rescue us and to save us, we shall be looking out for one another and bearing one another’s anxieties and fears, as well as sharing our hopes and dreams, engaging in fellowship with one another and in the Spirit. Let us count on God’s gifts and blessings as given to us through the diversity of our talents so that we may advance God’s Kingdom here on earth.

Furthermore, as our text today reminded us that **God has also given us the gift of community that we can always count on.** We are never left alone. Whenever we need our faith to be nurtured, to lend our support, our listening ears, or simply a shoulder to cry and lean on, someone will be there for us. The Spirit will prompt us into action in reaching out to someone who just need to a phone call or a text message of comfort and encouragement. This is how the Holy Spirit works – unexpectedly, powerfully but yet rewarding.

**Furthermore, we’ve also seen another phenomenon. We have witnessed the very first recorded gathering of the early Christian faith community.** The gospel writer named each of the remaining eleven Apostles by name, including many of the women followers, as well as the immediate family members of Jesus.

By naming theses disciples and fellow follower, it implied that the core of the early church was not simply comprised of only those who were the elite chosen. Those women were there all along, supporting the ministry of Jesus and now the apostles. Each of them was given a **sense of ownership** of what God has commissioned them to do. **Jesus’s earthly ministry has now completed. It has now passed on to us to continue the next leg of the race.** The Holy Spirit will be with us through each and every step of the way, **to encourage us, to pray for us, to comfort us, and to cheer us on.**

**Never under-estimate what God CAN and WILL do in our lives!** Christ has challenged his disciples to be His witnesses and to bring his message of salvation and hope to the “ends of the earth.” The challenge for us today is this…. “**What ‘ends of the earth’ haven’t we explored, if at all?**

This may or may not mean literally. The “end of the earth” could mean that we stretch our imagination, take a giant leap of faith, try something new and different, to think more “outside the box”, yet it doesn’t mean that we need to abandon our current practices. Be opened to what the Spirit tells us. As God declares,***“I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men*** *shall dream dreams.[[11]](#footnote-11)*

**Are we setting parameters and limiting what God can and will do in our lives?** Just remember that none of this is made possible, by our own human power. **We need God as much as God requires us in order to fully participate in God’s mission. This is part of our calling to be his faithful disciples today.** As one theologian puts it, “***the apostles were in need of divine assistance. The Christian mission is not merely a human enterprise. It is a divinely ordained and guided one.”***

Friends, these are the challenges and questions that we must wrestle with today, as we welcome the Holy Spirit to dwell among us during this upcoming season of Pentecost. We give thanks for the Spirit’s inspiration and persistence in not giving up on us, even though at times we may have failed and disappointed God. As we live through the uncertain days of the wilderness, the Spirit has continued to give us hope with a sense of purpose and of mission.

As Jesus said, *"the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few;therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."[[12]](#footnote-12)* We shall no longer stare at one another and into the heaven waiting for Jesus to return, but instead we shall keep our eyes opened and fix our hearts upon the risen Lord as we respond to God’s calling in participating in God’s mission here on earth.

This is our greatest hope and joy as we live out God’s vision and purpose for us. May all thanks and praise be to God….in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Matthew 28:20* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Acts 1:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Acts 1:10-11* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Acts 1:11* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Luke 24:5* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *John 21:3* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Luke 24:52-53* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *White, Sean A. Feasting on the Word Year A, Volume 2, P.498* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Acts 1:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Micah 6:8* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Acts 2:17* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Matthew 9:37-38* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)