

# Sermon Text for May 17, 2020 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

## *ASCENSION SUNDAY*

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Psalm 47, Luke 24:44-53

### ***“He’s Back...”***

I’m sending a bit of a cultural confusion surrounding us right about now. A little bit as if we are on a rudderless ship. Remember last week when we spoke about Hannah and Mary and how they were able to make decisions based upon the leading of their hearts which was always directed and guided by a submission to Almighty God? This type of decision making allows you to know that it is by the power of God that we move and have our being, and that we can decide based upon the guidance of our heart, based upon our hearts having a singular focus which is the desires of our Lord to install his kingdom here on this earth.

Leadership is that which is willing to provide structure even if it is unwanted structure, but which allows those under that leadership to be protected and to have life. Leadership ought to have the ability to provide protection for the people under which it leads even if those people do not want the type of protection that is being provided. We want to be together as a people, as a family, as individuals who get stir crazy and use our way of living as a call to normalcy, but like a child who wants to chase a ball into the street until they are told not to and even then may not fully understand the danger of running into the street to get the ball, so we at times have a tendency to self-destruct.

It is interesting to me that right now there is a debate between choosing life and financial stability, or regaining a sense of normalcy. There is a debate that is raging between the life that we now have which will eventually morph into something that we used to know, and a demand for a quality of life which tempts God and turns a blind eye to death. I believe the Christian approach is life, always, I am pro-life even in today’s culture where we see people almost celebrating their desire to regain a life they once knew, which in fact will put them and the rest of us in danger.

This is especially true for churches. I believe that churches will be the next cruise ships in this battle against this enemy that we have forgotten is an enemy. It is not our friend and we have a strategy to beat it, and for some reason many are choosing the side of potential death over life.

Last week we saw the end of Jesus’ infancy narratives where we saw an adolescent Jesus being called a child by his mother even as they did not fully understand his presence among them. We saw his first words which reminded us that his presence was to be with the Father,

today we hear Jesus' last words not before his death, but before he is taken up into heaven and as Mark states, to sit at the right hand of the Father. Today we are celebrating Ascension Sunday, which actually the day isn't until Thursday, but we are going to anticipate it today.

On this day that we celebrate that Jesus gave us and his disciples all that they need to install the kingdom of God upon this earth before he comes again, including the power of the Holy Spirit, after a few weeks away from the stories of the resurrected Jesus we find that He is back. Just like the Terminator promised to be back and he came back and as Jack Nicholson promised as he said: "Here's Johnny", so Jesus promised that he would be back and he did come back. But then he leaves again permanently from this earth. But not before he leaves us with what we need, completely with what we need.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

After worship on Sunday, May 3 I received a text message with a video from Gary and Marvis Hambleton. The video showed Todd Hambleton with his house mate Jelani with their eyes glued on the TV set as I was speaking the words of institution. They were each holding onto the piece of bread that the house parent had given them in order to be ready for the communion. As I invited people to take the elements they did with a solemnity and with a sense of purpose that was not lost on me. It reminded me of why we do what we do here. That even as the distance separates us still people are celebrating the sacraments and experiencing the living presence of Jesus our Savior. It has to be one of the most powerful moments and images that I have experienced in all of my time as a pastor. That video of that communion will be forever ingrained upon my mind as a reason for why we do this when I am tired, or wondering if it is all worth it. Todd reminded me that it is, it really, really is.

When we look at Psalm 47 today we find a Psalm of celebration. We read that God has gone up with a shout and as a result we should all clap our hands, shout to God with loud songs of joy. This picture of joy and celebration is a promise not just for those within ear shot, but as we read in vs.7 that God is the kind of all the earth, of all people. As a result we see that an unmitigated joy for the people is expected. The presence of the Lord ought to create a sense of joy that is unmatched in all the people, no matter who you are or where you are.

This joy ought to not be dictated by life situations or realities that may surround you. Our joy is not based upon any of our temporal realities, but rather upon the fact that Jesus is Lord and sits at the right hand of God the father. If you believe this then joy, joy ought to be your way of living and being.

We read about this also in Luke in our second Scripture for today. Every Gospel and Acts of the Apostles contains a scene after Jesus is raised from the dead, when he is taken up into heaven. I just want to be clear about this because personally I don't preach much about this. Jesus lived a perfect life, a life that was without blemish. Jesus suffered and died, as we read in vs.46 that he was predicted to do so, as we know and crucified on Calvary. This is part of our story of faith. Jesus rose again so that we can say: He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! The testimony of the resurrection is a central component to our faith which requires that death has been defeated and that the last word is that of our Lord and Father. Jesus provides eternal life through the resurrection because he conquered death which washed away our sins which would prevent us from being with God.

But did we know that Jesus appeared to the disciples and the women in the Gospel story and spent time with them, and taught them even after the resurrection. Luke gives us the story of the road to Emmaus where two believers encounter Jesus and do not realize it is him until they break bread together. We pick up our Scripture after this appearance and as those two were telling the 11 disciples about it and Jesus appears among them again. Jesus has a way of appearing when we least expect it. After this appearance then we find in vs.51 that as he was blessing them, he raised his hands, and then he went to heaven to be with his, and our Father.

But what did Jesus tell his disciples when he came back for this brief visit? Why did he come back? Look at vs.44 where he reminds them that everything he had told them about himself had already been told to them through the writing of Moses and the Psalms. He is the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord of Lords that Scripture had promised would come. While he establishes who he was, he then gives them a charge for whom they should be. Look at vs.48, you are my witnesses, then again in vs. 49 you will be clothed with power from on high.

Jesus is telling his disciples to go back to Jerusalem and wait for in a short while you will receive power that will equip you with everything that you need in order to carry out my work. You would think that once Jesus leaves he would want his disciples to get right to work. No, he tells them, go back home and wait. I promise you you will receive what you need. You don't have it now. He was predicting the day of Pentecost when they would receive the Holy Spirit. If they left their homes too early they would not be able to do that which would contribute to the kingdom.

You see Pentecost completes Easter just as Easter completes Good Friday. We are left without much when there is no power of the Holy Spirit. But they had to wait until it came to them. If they had been out trying to do even God's work without waiting they may have missed

it. At times we think we are doing good and the right thing, but this command to wait is necessary for all of us.

It is similar to when Jesus encounters Mary right after the resurrection and he tells her do not hold onto me until I am ascended to the Father. There is a time and place for all things. You will get what you need, I know that you are anxious and want to start on your own, but right now you are not ready. Right now we are not ready. Can we hear Jesus' words speaking to us today even as our anger rises because we feel that our liberties are being taken away from us? It is not forever, it is for your own good, wait in Jerusalem. They had to wait 50 days, I know, our 50 days have come and gone, but sometimes the waiting allows the future to be in a better place.

Our responsibility is to be a witness to Christ. If you look at vs.48 we see that our responsibility is to be a witness to the need of repentance and the possibility for the forgiveness of sins as we read in vs.47. We find all through Acts these Scriptures, and if you are listening one of you write these Scriptures: Acts 2:38, Acts 3:19, Acts 5:31, Acts 11:18, Acts 17:30. The need to know that Jesus' message is one of repentance and the forgiveness of sins can never be highlighted enough.

But after 20 centuries, we think we are entitled to certain life unrelated to the act of Christ. After 20 centuries if we don't get what we want then we act as if we were petulant children who deserve certain things, when in reality it is the presence of Christ who allows us to be God's children, nothing that we have done. After 20 centuries, preaching a crucified Christ and accepting all people equally continue as problems haunting the concerns of the church. We have a problem with a suffering Messiah, because we have a problem with our own suffering. We have a problem with a message to be preached to all nations because we think that only our nation is great. We could not be more wrong. God is great, and only God is great.

Let me tell you that God is at work and something marvelous is about to happen. Look at vs.52-53 where we read that they returned to Jerusalem and stayed there and while they were there they in a state of great joy. At the beginning of Jesus' life when the shepherds encountered him they then left with great joy. Today, at the his ascension, the last time that he is on the face of the earth, the result of him coming back was that his disciples were empowered with everything that they needed in order to carry out his plans, with great joy. Be a disciple filled with joy as a result of the presence of the Lord. Amen.