

Acts 1:3-5, 8-11 - Ascension [5.5.2016]

Church of the ascended Lord

³ During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

... ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹ After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰ As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!" [NLT]

What backup plans do you have in place, if things don't work out the way you wish? Last year, while planning for the wedding of our son, we had to come up with a backup plan, because it was announced that there would be no electricity during the time the service would be. At the reception it was a similar story - they had to have a backup plan, otherwise we would have been in the dark.

What backup plans do you have in place? A story is told of Satan asking Jesus, 'Are these the people you chose to spread the message of salvation to the world?' When Jesus said, 'yes', Satan asked, 'Do you have a plan B?' Jesus responds and says, 'There is no plan B. There are only these people.' There is no plan B - there is no 'backup plan' - for the message of Jesus Christ to reach the world. His only plan is that his church will be built through us who are called as the

Church of the ascended Lord

Can you imagine how it must have felt on that Day of Ascension, as the disciples looked up to where their Lord had suddenly disappeared from their sight. One can almost hear them calling out, 'Lord, you can't do this to us! Here you send us to witness concerning you to the ends of the earth - you can't just leave us like this.' We have no idea what to do!

'Don't just stand there gazing up into the sky. You've been given a mission' - these are not the exact words of the two angels, but don't we find ourselves doing the same?

There may be times when we look to heaven almost in desperation. We have been given our Lord's commission, yet it seems so often that we really don't cope too well with what he has given us to do. We are to be his church - and so often we wish that we would see his great might and power working amongst us.

Yet his power is here. The very fact that his church has survived throughout the centuries - in spite of the worst efforts of governments through the ages to destroy the church. We may know that we have not been left to fend for ourselves.

As the *Church of the ascended Lord* we have his assurance that he is with us - and that his power has not diminished: He has been given all power, and he has power beyond death and the grave. What is needed from us is to take note of what he said - and what he did not say, before he ascended.

What Jesus did not say was: get to work immediately after I have ascended to heaven. He did not say to them: Make plans and set up study-groups to come up with the best ways of carrying out the task I have given you. He did not tell them: conduct surveys about the best methods to grow the church, and how best to reach the people with the message of the Gospel. He did not even say: make sure that you have enough financial backing before you start out.

Instead Jesus tells them to **wait** in Jerusalem - to wait until his promised Holy Spirit would come on them. He did not say how long they should wait - just for them to wait. To wait for God's time to be right.

Waiting for God's spirit to guide us: Have there not been times - in our

congregation and church also - when we have looked to what others do - and think that we must follow their lead. Yet, God has his special plan - his way in which this congregation is to grow and be a part of his church. At different times God has revealed something of what he wants done - yet there is still this waiting.

We don't always do so well waiting - we think that we have to be busy doing something! Yet waiting for the Spirit does not mean just sitting around and doing nothing. Quite the contrary! Waiting for the Spirit we are to be busy with his Word. We are to be busy praying for him to open our ears, our hearts and our minds so that we will understand what he wants us to do, and where he is leading us. [That, by the way, is what those early Christians did. They continued to meet regularly, and during this time elected an apostle, Matthias to take Judas Iscariot's place.]

Waiting for God's time, because we have Jesus' promise, **But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere - in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

The size of this commission can really take your breath away - telling people everywhere about him! But we are not meant to do it out under our own power! As we wait for the Spirit - as we await his prompting and guiding - we have the promise of his power. It is a lot less complicated than we often think: **when the Holy Spirit comes, you will receive power ...**

The power of our Lord - through his Spirit - is present in his church. In spite of many fears that the Christian church is on the decline, it is actually growing at a faster rate than any other religion - only it is growing where the Holy Spirit is there to give his power to the Word.

If his church is to grow where we are too, we don't need a 'plan B', but we need to look to the Spirit - to receive his power, and the guidance he gives us. We are the people Jesus has called today, to **tell people about Jesus everywhere.**

As we look to celebrating Pentecost in 10 days time, it is with an expectation that Jesus will once again pour out his Spirit on us, his church. But we need

to be ready - because his call can reach us at any time.

As the *Church of the ascended Lord* we are to know: There is no backup plan - it is up to you and me to be involved, and to live out our calling by his power, and to his glory.

We do so, because we have the promise: **"someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!"**

It is for this day that we live.