



## **PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE**

Rev. Mark A. Medina

May 28, 2017

On Sunday 26 march, I began my time with you as your Transitional Pastor. There was an air of anticipation for my arrival as well as anxiety. Assisting in worship and then greeting and conversation with folks afterwards, gave me a sense of welcome into the life of this congregation. It was during many of those conversations that I was informed that people were leaving in the near future to their other homes.

The search committee did inform me that there would be people preparing to leave before, during and after I arrived. So when folks shared with me of their preparations to leave, they conveyed their hope and prayers. They expressed hope for a meaningful time here and to move to a better place in congregational life. There will be prayers for the ongoing health of the church and for the members and staff. Many expressed that their thoughts would be with us until we meet again.

For those of us who remain, we are in a time of transition and work. We are living in and with a new reality. You have come through much healing and resolve since last summer. And now you are living with hope and moving forward with restorative ways. The presence of Christ continues to be in this church.

Friends, we are living in a time when Jesus is calling us more than every to live in a time of hope, love and peace. As he prepared his disciples then as well as today for his departure and return to the Kingdom of God, he is getting us ready to be about his ways of his ministry in the world.

One of the creeds or statements of belief for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the Nicene Creed. It encompasses the entire understanding of the Trinity of God much like the Apostles' Creed does. Since the Lectionary emphasis for today is the Ascension of Jesus, I lift up what this confession proclaims about him.

**Through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven;  
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,  
and was made human.  
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered and was buried.  
The third day he rose again, according to the scriptures.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again with glory  
to judge the living and the dead.  
His kingdom will never end.**

As people of the Christian Faith, we can affirm what God did in sending his Son to us. God's manifestation of love is central to why we are here and how humanity is to exist. The major event of God's love came through the gift of Jesus, the Savior of humanity. The Gospel of John affirms what God has done in Jesus. **16“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.** John 3:16 (nrsv)

Indeed the life of our Savior gave us the truth of God's creative and redemptive powers. Through the raising of Jesus from the dead, God gave us hope for the eternal.

The Lord was preparing the faithful, you and I, for his departure ever since he talked with Mary outside the tomb. He knew he had to go on to be with God in heaven so the eternal plan could continue. As he said in John 20:17 (NRSV) **17Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”**

Jesus knew he had to ascend back to God's holy presence so he could bestow upon the faithful the Creator's Spirit. The power of God permitted the Risen Lord to be seen by the faithful. This reinforced the Lord's presence with the disciples for a little while before blessing them with the Holy Spirit. The Savior also appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and in the locked upper room. Both times Jesus opened their eyes to the power of God; the graciousness of God.

The passage from Luke 24 continues the revelation of Jesus after he appeared to the disciples. He said to them **44... “these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”** He knew he had to fulfill the scriptures. The fulfillment of scripture was coming to fruition.

The Lord continued to better prepare them so that **45...their minds would understand the scriptures, 46and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48You are witnesses of these things.**

**49 And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."**

Jesus gave them and us a commission as to what they are to be about and what we are to be about after he returned to God. They were and we are to continue his ministry in the world and transform people into faithful disciples.

At his ascension, Jesus, **lifting up his hands, he blessed them.** <sup>51</sup>**While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.** But it doesn't end there because it says <sup>52</sup>**and they worshiped him.** They continued to worship him from that day forward. They **returned to Jerusalem with great joy;** because they knew that Jesus would be back someday and they knew that Jesus was with God. What else did they do? <sup>53</sup>**And they were continually in the temple blessing God.** Thanking God for Jesus Christ.

This last chapter of Luke is preparing us to experience what awaits all disciples in the First chapter of the Book of Acts. The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is bestowed upon disciples just as Jesus promised before he returned to God.

If you were to look at the First chapter of the Book of Acts verses 8 thru 9 proclaims **"... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."**

Friends, this is what each of us is called to do as well. To witness to Jesus Christ throughout the world from Green Valley and beyond so that others know that Jesus is Lord and he is the one who is guiding our lives. Because we are disciples of Christ. We don't need a uniform, we need a heart convicted and loved by Jesus Christ.

Like the Nicene Creed, the Ecumenical version of the Apostles' Creed proclaims that Jesus **was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

So my friends, the Ascension of Jesus is a significant part of the salvation story and the promise of God's Son throughout creation. An excerpt from *The Gospel Project* helps us to see what we are to be about in our witness of faith: **"Joy, hope, and mission are three consistent responses of the disciples to Christ's resurrection and ascension."**

Joy. The joy of the disciples was in knowing that Jesus prepared his followers for his return to the Kingdom. He also promised that he would return once again someday. In the meantime, we need to keep our faith strong and thriving so the Lord can come again to see how we are making disciples for Christ. The great commission is for all.

Hope. As a result of our experiences we have a hope that we can persevere through all situation in life. All things are possible with God. When the Lord returns, may he find disciples who see hope in everything and in all the words we express. Hope.

Mission. The mission of the faithful and the church is to make disciples and avoid making self-centered and self-absorbed people. The church has to

return to its original mission of drawing and mentoring people for christ. To make disciples so that the word can continue; continue into the future.

So my Christian sisters and brothers, we have been blessed by Christ to carry on the message of salvation, Good News, and ministry in the world. This blessing is affirmed through the gift of the Holy Spirit. May we further the Kingdom of God by inviting others to join in this journey of faith so that they can understand and can accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and to move on in life.

The Lord has prepared us for his departure. Now it is our time to utilize our discipleship to bring others to him. Let us celebrate with our lives much like what the Psalmist puts forth in Psalm 47 and that is **<sup>1</sup>Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy. <sup>2</sup>For the LORD, the most High, is awesome, a great King over all the earth.**

We are disciples of Christ. We are being commissioned once again to witness to his life and to his love and to his grace so that other can be part of this family.

May it be so for us all.

Let us pray: God Most High, we gather to honor and glorify you. Receive our invitation to dwell with us. Enfold us in your presence and fill us again with holy awe and mystery and Spirit. We are yours and we claim you as our God. Amen.

+++++

Scriptural support:

Psalm 47 God's Rule over the Nations  
To the leader. Of the Korahites. A Psalm.

- <sup>1</sup> Clap your hands, all you peoples;  
shout to God with loud songs of joy.
  - <sup>2</sup> For the LORD, the Most High, is awesome,  
a great king over all the earth.
  - <sup>3</sup> He subdued peoples under us,  
and nations under our feet.
  - <sup>4</sup> He chose our heritage for us,  
the pride of Jacob whom he loves.
- Selah*

- <sup>5</sup> God has gone up with a shout,  
the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.
- <sup>6</sup> Sing praises to God, sing praises;  
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
- <sup>7</sup> For God is the king of all the earth;  
sing praises with a psalm.

<sup>8</sup> God is king over the nations;  
God sits on his holy throne.  
<sup>9</sup> The princes of the peoples gather  
as the people of the God of Abraham.  
For the shields of the earth belong to God;  
he is highly exalted.

Luke 24:44-53 (NRSV)

<sup>44</sup>Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

The Ascension of Jesus

<sup>50</sup>Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup>While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup>and they were continually in the temple blessing God.