Acts 1:1-11 (11b) This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

On this day we are celebrating the Ascension of Jesus. Because of how we do our services, we only get to contemplate the Ascension of Jesus every other year. I like that. I like that because every time I come back to this part of the life of Jesus I am all the more filled with awe and wonder for my Savior. So let’s look at our text and what it has to say. Our theme is simple: **THE ASCENSION AND ITS EVENTS.**

The first thing I want you to contemplate are our opening words. They say, **“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instruction through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.”** I pray that you know that the Evangelist Luke, yes, the same Luke who wrote the Gospel that bears his name is the same person who is now writing the Acts of the Apostles. He shares that connection by telling you about the connection. He has a former book. That former book is all about Jesus. What Jesus came to do and what Jesus intended to teach. He even tells us that his book covers from the beginning of Jesus until Jesus is taken up, yep, until the Ascension of Jesus. He expects then that you will grasp and understand that even now, in this book his purpose and intent is to still speak of Jesus and the work Jesus wants carried out.

How do we know what happened is what Jesus wanted? The verse said, **“after giving instruction through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.”** After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus spent considerable time with his disciples, those men who were going to be “sent out” to the world. That is the meaning of the word “apostle”, “sent out.” These men are sent out by Jesus, prepared by Jesus, taught by Jesus, chosen by Jesus, and yes, follow what is said, these are the men already touched by the Holy Spirit so that they could grasp and understand all that Jesus was about. That might shock you that I say already the Holy Spirit was with the apostles. It is true, the Holy Spirit isn’t going to be formerly acknowledged in His work and purpose until Pentecost, which is next week, but I assure you that these men, these chosen of Jesus could not have grasped or understood diddly squat about Jesus unless the Holy Spirit was already with them. There is more Holy Spirit coming but please note that He is already at work!

When Jesus prayed with his disciples on Maundy Thursday evening he told them what the Holy Spirit would do. He said, **“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”** Then recall that on the night of the Resurrection, when Jesus appeared to his disciples in that locked room for the first time, he breathed on them and said, **“Receive the Holy Spirit.”** From that point on these men have been under the power of the Holy Spirit. They couldn’t do anything but exactly what Jesus wanted!

Next verse. **“After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”** I love this verse. This verse highlights for us the whole point and focus of Jesus, namely the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It does mention his suffering, to remind us that all of this was so that Jesus could be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Jesus’ suffering on the cross was where all of our sins were paid for and we know that because Jesus then rose from the dead. Note the purpose of the 40 days Jesus spent with his disciples and many other believers. It was done to convince them He was alive. That’s because without the resurrection of Jesus, the actual physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we got nothing. If Jesus stays dead our faith us useless and the most foolish thing there is. It is because of the resurrection that we grasp and understand the great gift we have in Jesus, namely the “kingdom of God.”

Before I speak about this kingdom, let me direct you to one other thought I have. This verse tells us Jesus appeared to these men over a period of forty days. Be aware that Scripture only records for us just a few of those instances, just like Scripture only records for us a fraction of the miracles Jesus did. I believe that Jesus appeared so often and so many times that if we knew all the instances we would be stunned just like we would be if we actually knew all the miracles of Jesus. What I can tell you is this, Every single disciple, every believer, especially, I think, that core group of 120 gathered at Pentecost had so interacted, learned, and hung out with Jesus that there was absolutely no doubt to them and many others that Jesus was indeed alive. Wonderfully and eternally alive for the glory of God!

Now let’s turn our attention to the “kingdom of God” we heard about. There are many who make much of the words that follow, in not necessarily a positive way. Verses 4-8, **“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them; ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’”**

As you read this and you conclude that the disciples don’t understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God that Jesus is at this time setting up, I believe you are in error. To say the disciples still don’t get it, would be to undermine the work of the Holy Spirit here. How about this rather. Luke does not record this because the disciples don’t get it but rather because the Holy Spirit knows that so many churches in the future won’t get it. He records this, under divine inspiration, so that all those churches today that still want to teach a “kingdom of God on this earth” can understand they are wrong! It is true, when Jesus returns again, and he will return as our highlighted verse at the beginning reminds us, there will be a “new heaven and a new earth” where God and his children will live forever. Not this world, but a new one! In the meantime, since we don’t know when the eternal triumphant kingdom will come, we have work to do. That work is laid out nicely.

First, that work will be that the disciples are to wait in Jerusalem for the coming Holy Spirit, which Jesus had clearly promised to them. When that Holy Spirit comes, in a very formal way, the work of the Holy Christian Church will then formally begin. And there will be changes. For instance, John’s baptism, which was just water and symbolic, will now with the command of Jesus at the Ascension become Christian baptism, water applied that will bring the Holy Spirit and the gifts the Holy Spirit will bring. The Spirit will call us to faith, that is, make us alive to God’s Wonder and Word, will make us new creatures to serve Jesus. That’s what faith is. The Holy Spirit will strengthen our faith, and guide us in the wisdom and truth of Jesus. The Spirit will motivate these men to record the power of Jesus in the Word of the New Testament and with that Word begin to spread the message of Jesus to all the world so that all the souls who are to be the Lord’s will hear and believe. This spreading of the message of Jesus is going to go on until the “ends” of the earth, until the full time of the earth is completed and God then establishes his New Heaven and Earth. The Holy Spirit will oversee, encourage, motivate, and invigorate the work of this spreading of the message of Jesus.

So the Holy Spirit isn’t trying to make the disciple look dumb or like they still don’t get it, the Holy Spirit is making sure that we in today’s world get it. Today, there are a whole bunch of churches that deny the actual physical resurrection of Jesus. They deny the power of Jesus behind the Word or they deny the verbal inspiration of the Bible declaring it just the pious writings of men rather than God. Today, there are all kinds of Christian churches who will tell you Jesus is not necessary for salvation or that God is really only what you want him to be. They no longer proclaim the Kingdom of God. They no longer preach and teach Jesus as the Savior from sin and the very point of what the Christian Church is about. It is sad, but in truth, very few churches still proclaim the kingdom of God, the spiritual work of Jesus.

Verse 9 is awesome. Simple, direct. **“After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”** Read all the accounts of the Ascension of Jesus and you will get a sense of how the disciples have changed. From hiding in a locked room to now filled with praise and joy for Jesus! From the moment of the Ascension, they are now in the Temple courts, praising Jesus and waiting for the gift He promised them. No longer afraid, but anxious and eager to begin the work Jesus had prepared them for. And when the Holy Spirit came, from that point on the message of Jesus is it. Go and read what Luke tells us is the point of Jesus! The whole Scripture is about him. Luke records in 24:46-47 the focus of the disciples work. **“This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”**

The message of Jesus is the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. It is the message of souls brought to peace with God because Jesus paid for our sins and won the gift of eternal life and salvation. We tend to think it would have been better if Jesus had stayed on earth and conducted His ministry on earth, but it is clear God’s wisdom did what was best. Jesus ascended to sit at the right hand of God and rule over all things for the good of his church and the saving of souls to the glory of his Father.

Verse 11 is fun too. It says, **“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”** These two men, who suddenly appeared to them as they were staring after Jesus, may be the same two angels that Luke records showed up at the empty tomb of Jesus. They had directions then, they have direction now.

“What are you standing around for? This Jesus is clearly God and Lord and that’s why he has been taken to heaven. He gave you work to do. Get to it. Get to it because this same Jesus, get that, THIS SAME JESUS is coming back. He is not going to change. His message doesn’t need to be altered or fixed. The guy that left as God and Lord is coming back as God and Lord. Carry out his directions!” It is very clear as you continue to read the book of Acts that such is exactly what the disciples are going to do. They are going to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior from sin for all the world.

That message of Jesus is still going out. We here, in Mayville proclaim it. In Vassar, Saginaw and so many other places where God’s Word is proclaimed the message of Jesus is going out. The Holy Spirit will use that message to bring souls to faith just as He desires. To God the glory for this great day. Amen.