

**“See You Later!”
Acts 1:6-11**

This time of year is a time of transition. Graduations spell an ending and a new beginning. Teenagers who have had close relationships in high school leave each other as they say, “See you later.” College graduates prepare for a new life in their chosen vocations where there will be new challenges and relationships. “See you later.”

In our Acts 1 reading for today, Jesus speaks to His disciples on the Mount of Ascension and gives His final words to them: **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.** “See you later.”

Jesus’ ascension is all part of God’s saving plan. It was now forty days after His resurrection, and the ascension is the tenth recorded resurrection appearance of Jesus. Jesus showed Himself to be risen from the dead, and His rising is the central truth of the Gospel and of our faith. He met His disciples outside of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. As Jesus spoke to them, He began to rise, finally into the clouds, and He was physically gone from His disciples.

In His final words to His disciples He shared three reasons why He was leaving:

- So the disciples can receive the Holy Spirit.
- So the disciples could get on with their God-given tasks.
- The sooner He leaves, the sooner He will return.
- These words are God’s Words of comfort and encouragement to you as you live in these days between the first and second comings of your Savior.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus had laid out the plan of what would happen. He had told His disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit when He left them. **John 16:7—BUT I TELL YOU THE TRUTH: IT IS FOR YOUR GOOD THAT I AM GOING AWAY. UNLESS I GO AWAY, THE COUNSELOR WILL NOT COME TO YOU; BUT IF I GO, I WILL SEND HIM TO YOU.** Ten days later the disciples would receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the New Testament Church would be established.

God’s purpose and desire in His work in the world is that all people spend an eternity with Him in the New Jerusalem, in heaven. His Kingdom is established on earth as people come to faith and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, to convert people who are born into this world under Satan’s rule and to create saving faith in their hearts so they believe and are saved.

The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel and the Sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, to bring you to faith and to strengthen you in faith for your earthly pilgrimage. You received the gift of the Holy Spirit in your Baptism when you were born of water and the Spirit. On Pentecost Peter told the crowds: **REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED, EVERY ONE OF YOU, IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. AND YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.** Through the Holy Spirit’s power you are preserved and led to serve the Lord in your life. The Spirit is your source of strength and guidance as you live this side of heaven.

What is the evidence of the Holy Spirit in your life? He brings to mind what God tells you in His Word. He reminds you of who Jesus is and of God’s plan to save you. He reminds you that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life...that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep...that He goes to prepare a place for you. He also prompts your confession of faith. St. Paul tells us, **NO ONE CAN SAY THAT ‘JESUS IS LORD’ EXCEPT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.** This time of year with many college graduations, former students become employees or they go into business for themselves. The grades earned in high school or college mean little to the employer or to the customer. The quality of work done comes first. After all the tests and courses and finally graduation comes the world of work. It’s time to transition to bigger things. Jesus announced a transition to His disciples and to you as He ascended into heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit who lives in you, who guides you into the Lord’s ways. The Holy Spirit is your Counselor.

Today Jesus says to you in His ascension, “See you later. The Holy Spirit is my Presence and Direction in your life.” What a blessing it is that Jesus ascended into heaven so that we can receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

There is a second truth for us in Jesus’ ascension. He invites the disciples and us to participate in His soul-saving mission: **YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.**

The last words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Matthew echo Jesus’ desire for His disciples and for us: **GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBEY ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED.** He also promises His power and His presence as they fulfill this call.

This past two weeks has been filled with accounts of destruction and death as a result of the tornados that have ripped through the Midwest and particularly the southern states. Jesus reminds us that these events happen so we remember that in the last days of the earth there will be earthquakes, famines, wars, people who are filled with fear. But these events are also our call to action, to demonstrate as Christians the love of Jesus to those who are hurting in our country and in the world.

Jesus, our Lord, has saved us by His grace, His undeserved love for us, and He invites us to love others unconditionally. We have the privilege of sharing the love that we have received in Jesus with others in our relationships and in our world.

We have the opportunity to reach out to our West Central community through three events this month. Next Sunday is the West Central Block party from noon until 3:00. Come and talk with and get to know our neighbors here in West Central. Vacation Bible School is the week of June 20-24. This is a chance for us to reach out to children and their families with the message of Jesus. The first Summer of Service event is Saturday, June 25 beginning at 9:00. We will be doing yard work and helping our neighbors with the care of their property. As we communicate the love of Jesus in word and action, we have the opportunity to get to know our neighbors. "See you later" Jesus says in His ascension, and He gave His disciples and us the highest calling: Be my witnesses.

Finally, Jesus ascension into heaven is also the source of hope for us as we live each day. As the disciples watched Jesus ascending into the clouds, the two men dressed in white, angels—messengers of God—said to them, "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."

This is a description of Jesus' return--in the clouds with His angels with Him. Rev. 1 tells us: LOOK, HE IS COMING IN THE CLOUDS, AND EVERY EYE WILL SEE HIM, EVEN THOSE WHO PIERCED HIM; AND ALL THE PEOPLES OF THE EARTH WILL MOURN BECAUSE OF HIM. Harold Camping, a preacher, made the news by proclaiming the return of Christ in the rapture which was to have taken place two weeks ago. Make no mistake, Christ is returning and several facts about His return in glory are certain. He will come on a day and hour that cannot be predicted. Jesus says in Matthew 24: NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT THAT DAY OR HOUR, NOT EVEN THE ANGELS IN HEAVEN, NOR THE SON, BUT ONLY THE FATHER. It will also come like a thief in the night. The day of Jesus' return is not predictable.

Also, there will not be a rapture of the saved. When Jesus comes again, the final judgment will take place immediately. St. Paul paints a picture of the Last Judgment in I Thessalonians 4: FOR THE LORD HIMSELF WILL COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, WITH A LOUD COMMAND, WITH THE VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL, AND WITH THE TRUMPET CALL OF GOD, AND THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST. AFTER THAT, WE WHO ARE STILL ALIVE AND ARE LEFT WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR. AND SO WE WILL BE WITH THE LORD FOREVER. THEREFORE ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER WITH THESE WORDS.

The words of the angels at Jesus ascension remind us to live each day anticipating Christ's coming again in glory. That day will be our day of deliverance, whether we physically die or are alive when Christ's return. We will be with the Lord forever. THIS SAME JESUS WHO WAS TAKEN FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN WILL COME IN THE SAME WAY YOU HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN. You can say with St. Paul, I HAVE A DESIRE TO DEPART AND TO BE WITH CHRIST WHICH IS FAR BETTER.

A man and his wife had been married 62 years. Both were devoted to the Lord and to each other. On a spring morning the husband was stricken with a serious heart attack. The EMS attendants transported him to the hospital where was moved to intensive care. After a long wait, his wife was brought to his room. They talked about many things—their children and grandchildren, plans for the summer, and their trust in the Lord who would see them through.

The day raced by and night came. "Go ahead home and get some sleep," the husband said, "I'll be fine. I'm in the Lord's hands." As the wife prepared to leave she said, "I'll see you later; tomorrow will be a new day." During the night, the Lord took the man to heaven. She was right. She would see her husband later, at the dawn of an eternal day. That's our certain hope as Easter Christians!

Jesus' Ascension is a reality check for each of us. We have received the gift of the Holy Spirit in our Baptism, and we are kept in faith by Him. We have a mission—to be witnesses of our Lord Jesus to a world that is dying without Him. We also are certain of Jesus' return and we anticipate the dawn of an eternal day. Even so come Lord Jesus as you have promised. Amen.

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