

Text: Acts 1:1-11

Theme: Ascension Joy

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the first lesson of Acts chapter one verses one through eleven.

Boys and Girls, how are you doing this morning? Good? Good! When I was your age, one of my favorite things to do, and still is, was to read comic books. One of my favorites was called “Superman”. He had a slogan that matches our text for today quite well, “Up, Up, and Away!” He would say that and then fly up into the sky. What did we hear about in our text for today? Jesus went away, up into the sky, until the cloud hid Him from the sight of the disciples. Is this a reason for sadness or joy? Let’s listen to the rest of the sermon and find out. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

Where is Jesus? Where is God? Jesus has ascended up to heaven, to the right hand of the Father. He is no longer physically upon the earth. We cannot say ‘Hey, there is Jesus!’ At first glance this could be cause for great sadness as it can feel like we are alone. It can feel like God is no longer with us. Therefore when horrible things happen, we question and doubt. The young couple had spent the last forty weeks in such excitement waiting for the birth of their first child. The nursery was decorated, and the baby shower had been held. Both parents enjoyed week after week hearing their friends in church commenting on how her stomach was growing as God was busy knitting together this precious child. Now, at their due date, all that needed to happen was for their new bundle of joy to be born. But then the unthinkable happens. The mom-to-be notices that her child has stopped moving in her womb. A trip to the emergency room brings them to their knees when the physician tells them that no heartbeat can be found. Their unquenchable joy and anticipation quickly have become unspeakable sorrow. They ask, “How

can this happen? Why now? Isn't it enough that we've waited so patiently? Where is God in all of this?"

On the other side of the country, a "seasoned" couple gets ready to celebrate their sixty-fifth wedding anniversary. The children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren would all be coming home to make their joy complete. The guest bedrooms have been prepared. The food ordered. The pastor invited to come give them a blessing at the celebration. Just a few more days and they would start making the trips up to the airport to bring the family home. But then the unthinkable happens. Two days before the anniversary, the bride of sixty-five years awakens to find that her husband—the love of her life—died in his sleep. Their unquenchable joy and anticipation have become unspeakable sorrow. The bride and so many of the family ask, "How can this happen? Why now? Isn't it enough that we've waited so patiently? Where is God in all of this?"

In the midst of this great sorrow, where is God? Yes, we cannot physically see Jesus now, but that does not mean that He is no longer with us. In fact the opposite is true. Jesus has ascended and in the midst of hardship, this fact is a source of great joy for us. Not because we do not suffer or because we somehow enjoy suffering. No! Rather, The ascension of our Lord brings us joy because it means that He is indeed with us. He has not abandoned His people. Rather, as God, Jesus fills all things. He is with His people in the midst of their suffering to bring them hope and comfort. Jesus' ascension brings us joy because it proves His saving work has been accomplished. Jesus' suffering, bleeding, death, and resurrection from the dead has paid the price for all of your sins. Jesus has won for you your salvation now and forever.

This does not mean that life will always be easy. I don't have to tell you that this temporal life, this time and season, is difficult, because each of us has suffered in one way or another. We each have faced tragedies in our lives. Our challenge as Christians, however, is to remember—and *apply to the here and now*—what the disciples heard as Jesus was lifted into the cloud: "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (v 11). Is that not just for *another time*?

No. It is for here and now, for comfort for us in the midst of our hardships. That the same Jesus who was crucified, buried, and risen, will return again. He will return physically on that Last Day in power and glory, judge the living and the dead. And then what? All who believe in Him will live with Him forever and ever. Yet, it is not only a future hope that we have, we have a present hope as well. Your crucified, risen, and ascended Lord comes to you in the Holy Eucharistic feast. He comes to you in, with, and under the bread and the wine, in order to strengthen you with His presence. To give you a foretaste of the feast to come. To strengthen your faith in the midst of trial, to comfort you in your sorrows with His Presence, grace, and mercy.

In the midst of your struggle, in the times of hardship, where is Jesus? Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father for you. He is with you always to the very end of the age, giving you His comfort and peace through His Word and through His Sacraments, until that Day, when He will come again and we, along with all of His Saints, will be with Him forever and ever.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.