

REV. TODD HOEFFS

Ascension Day [observed]

Gathering the Scattered YouTube COVID message

Scripture: Luke 24:44-53 (NRSV)

Jesus' Ascension – the new "Normal"

May 24, 2020

### **Luke 24:44-53 (NRSV)**

44 Then Jesus 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." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 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, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You 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."

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

Normal.

Does anything feel "normal" to you yet?

Stores and businesses now are beginning to open and allow more people into the public sector safely.

Hopefully very soon we'll be offering larger gatherings for church services.

While we still practice safe distancing.

Hand washing

Face masks.

I know people long for a "back to normal" way of life.

But what does that even mean?

We've been in lockdown since March.

What was it like before?

What was YOUR life like before this all started?

Dictionary defines "normal" as conforming to a standard, usual, anticipated, expected, predictable.

All of our original habits we conducted with little thought—now we think twice about

All of our usual practices are altered for the foreseeable future.

Even our church practices.

We used to shake hands, embrace, speak to each other in close proximity.

Now we must weigh the need to welcome others in this way again.

Jesus spent a little over 30 years on the earth.

Welcome in many circles.

A carpenters' son, Divine Seed of the Heavenly Father.

Spent about 3 years among the crowds traveling with 12 disciples extracted from a “normal” life.

Ending such work by dying.

Death caught them all off guard.

Death at the hands of religious leaders and the Roman government.

And just when all seemed so lost, so ruined, Jesus returned to them.

Alive.

Risen.

In glorified body! With the nail hole battle scars from fighting the good fight for us as proof.

And now Jesus ascends back to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father.

Mission accomplished.

Work all done.

IT IS FINISHED.

40 days and nights Jesus spent on the earth after Easter.

He ate, spoke, visited, shared His presence with His believers.

Now the time on earth is done.

When all seemed to go back to normal,

Jesus departs.

For Gospel writer Luke, the Ascension of Jesus Christ is a pivotal event —

so significant that he felt the need to record it not once, but twice —

first at the very end of his Gospel,

and then again at the very beginning of his book of Acts.

The Ascension of Jesus serves as a bridge-like event connecting Jesus’ life and work to our life and work.

This is why His Ascension is so relevant.

For we who are in Christ ARE that bridge.

As people see the life and work of Jesus in our own life and work!

This is the new normal.

Jesus no longer walks around Israel.

He walks around inside each and every one of his believers.

It had never been the divine plan for Jesus to remain on earth forever.

Jesus was born to die.

The Son of God left His throne to earn our salvation as the world’s sacrifice.

Jesus won our freedom and returned back to that Heavenly throne.

All of this took His followers by surprise.

By virtue of the fact that Jesus’ disciples stared up into heaven tells us they expected a back to normal life.

Jesus-who-died-on-the-cross-and-rose-from-the-dead did not come back simply to take up his old job.

Its not business as usual.

It finished.

Work done.

Problem solved.

Salvation covers over all people.

The earth itself rejoices as flowers bloom and water claps its wave like hands.  
SO one more time Jesus re-assures His followers that all is not lost.  
Jesus opens up their minds.  
Tells then AGAIN  
That the CHRIST must suffer, die and rise  
AND THEN REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS BE PROCLAIMED TO ALL NATIONS!  
Not by Him – but by those who wear HIS name.  
These are the words He spoke to them while He was with them.  
Nothing new.  
Not back to normal.  
Now there's a new normal.  
Proclaim Repentance and Forgiveness.  
This repentance is a turning around and going in the opposite direction from which you originally intended.  
No doing it the same old way.  
No returning to the old job of plowing the field and looking back  
No picking up where you left off.  
Turn around  
Tell others to join you in turning around  
For in Christ and His name is forgiveness.  
Which it a total release from bondage to sin, death and the devil.  
This is the very same message Jesus stood up and told the gathered people in the synagogue 3 years earlier.  
Isaiah passage.  
Release from bondage.  
Good news to the poor.  
Freedom from captivity.  
That's Jesus.  
Now this is YOUR Message.  
You're Jesus.  
In that  
Jesus lives in you.  
Proclaim these things.  
Like John the Baptizer.  
Speak them out loud.  
Announce them.  
Make them real, relevant, robust.  
This is the new normal.  
You are Witnesses to these things.  
Jesus' witnesses.  
A called-into-court-sworn-witness testifying to the truth.  
The truth of Who Christ is and What He HAS done  
and continues to do through all of His believers.  
Such truth and power will come upon them in a week with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

This is the Father's promise.  
And He keeps His promises.  
A resurrected Jesus is living proof.  
And those who wait will be clothed.  
Dressed with the fire of the Holy Spirit.  
Which does come as a garment doesn't it?  
We are clothed in our baptisms.  
We are dressed with faith and the Holy Spirit by the water and the word.  
We are draped with the robe of Jesus  
And so God our Father sees Jesus when He sees us.  
Our sin which muddies the waters of our being is cleansed and mopped up as the life of Jesus  
resides in our lives.  
We belong to Him.  
We are His witnesses.  
We will speak good news for all to hear and be comforted as we are.  
Sometimes...  
We will speak bad news  
We will speak harsh words.  
We will speak and say the wrong things.  
For this we too repent and are forgiven.  
For our turning around is not a one time event.  
It wasn't a one time event for Jesus' disciples.  
Together we all die each day to our old ways and rise again new, in the new normal.  
Which is living as the Body of Christ in the world.  
We will still crave our old normal.  
We'll be impatient with those around us who wish the same.  
But the life of faith is a journey.  
One step at a time  
One conversation at a time  
One prayer at a time  
With the Spirit and our Lord on our side we will make it.  
As Jesus' blessed us now just as He blessed the crowds so many generations ago.  
He's in Heaven at the right hand of the Father.  
And by being there,  
He us here  
In you  
In me  
In every believer  
In every time and place.  
In every house and business  
In the Bible passages we read and hear  
In the remembrances of our baptisms  
In the hymns we sing  
The sermons we hear

The conversations of encouragement we have with each other  
In the bread and wine of Holy Communion we look forward to receive  
In the bread and wine of our daily meals in our homes.  
In the small talk we have with those we still see when we venture out.  
We as the church haven't always got it right.  
Christian Missionaries to Africa made a mistake about teaching the ascension of Jesus in the  
1700s.  
Most African tribes believed in a High Powerful god who lived in the ground, in earthly caves.  
Because missionaries strongly felt compelled to make tribes believe Jesus was up there in the  
air,  
they forced Africans to believe something that wasn't necessary.  
That Heaven is up and hell is down.  
And this had lasting negative effects on evangelism and witnessing with those people.  
Jesus ascends YES  
And remains within you forever by faith until the end of time.  
THAT is His blessing.  
That is His promise.  
So you'll never be alone.  
That is the new normal.  
That is your normal.  
Whatever your normal will be after our lockdown ceases,  
Your new normal will always be Christ living in your life.  
Welcome back to the new normal.  
Jesus ascended  
And Jesus is here [my heart].  
Amen.