

## **Sermon followed by Service - May 25, 2025 – Acts 1:1-11**

“Why? Why am I here?” You’ve heard that question before, haven’t you? We hear it in us and around us. “Why? Why am I here?” And then what? “I don’t have any friends.” “I can’t do what I want.” “I’m just a bother.” So “Why? Why am I here?” When you feel sicker than a dog and broken beyond fixing - “Why? Why am I here?” When your heart aches, and you feel no peace, no hope, no future - “Why? Why am I here?” Oh, when things get better you might forget for a while, but when trouble comes back, when things don’t go your way, the question comes back: “Why? Why am I here?”

Or maybe it’s not trouble, your trouble, that has you wondering “Why am I here?” It could be - Life is good. Your grass is green. Your flowers are blooming. If you see any yellow in your yard, it’s not dandelions, it’s tulips and daffodils brightening your day. Then you see that homeless guy. Or you’re making your vacation plans, plans to go out, plans to get away, and then a friend tells you how broke and broken they are. You can’t help but see how good you have it, when so many people don’t have it nearly so good, and you wonder: “Why? Why am I here?”

Oh, that can be a hard question. Sometimes it whips us with guilt. Sometimes it crushes with commands and demands - “I should this; I should that.” Sometimes it’s a question we run from, duck and hide from. “Why? Why am I here?”

You might be wondering: “What in the world does that have to do with Christ’s ascension?” Well, I’m glad you asked. Usually with Ascension Day we ask: “Why did Jesus ascend into heaven?” But our lesson doesn’t answer that question. Our lesson doesn’t even try to answer the question: “Why did Jesus ascend?” Instead our lesson answers the question: “Why did Jesus leave us behind?” Or, in different words: “Why? Why am I here?”

Jesus’ disciples headed into today thinking they knew the answer. They thought they were here to rule the world with Jesus. They thought Jesus was about to set up a Kingdom of God on Earth, a kingdom where Jesus would rid the world of evil and set up his people for a life of peace and prosperity with God. And they, the disciples, would get to rule with Jesus.

But Jesus didn’t come to set up some earthly kingdom of peace and prosperity, and no matter how we might wish for that, Jesus wasn’t about to fall into the trap of treating the here and now as more important than the there and then of heaven. So Jesus left for heaven to rule his way, and he left his disciples behind. He left us behind. Why? I’m not going to tell you yet.

Why not? First, we have to beat up on the disciples a bit. When you hear the disciples ask: “**Are you at this time going to set up your kingdom?**” don’t you wonder: “Why couldn’t they get it?” Time and again Jesus had been steering his disciples away from the idea of an earthly kingdom of peace and prosperity. But the disciples just couldn’t get it. We might get judgy: “Why couldn’t they get it?” And then what? What do we

do? We might live like life is about green grass and projects around the house. We might live like life is about getting away on the weekend, getting away in retirement. We might live like life is about ball games and video games. All those things can be great. But when we live like that's what life is about, then who are we to beat up on the disciples for not getting what life is about? Or we might think that life is about working peace and prosperity for our family. Wanting to provide peace and prosperity for our family can be a wonderful thing. But if we think setting up a kingdom of peace and prosperity for our family is what life is about, then we are just as wrong-headed as the disciples.

Life isn't about setting up a kingdom of peace and prosperity in this world for ourselves, for our family, for our country. Life in this world isn't about us. And when we think it is, that's idolatry - putting ourselves in place of God. When we think that life is about peace and prosperity for us and our people, that's when and that's why we have such a hard time with the question: "Why? Why am I here?"

So, "Why? Why am I here? Why did Jesus leave us behind in this world?" The answer Jesus gives isn't a command. The answer Jesus gives is a life of promise and privilege. Jesus left us behind to be witnesses. Witnesses of what? Some days we might think: "Witnesses of trouble? Witnesses of evil?" No, Jesus has left us behind in this world to be his witnesses - to tell his story.

We get to tell the truth of Jesus. In a world that is so broken and messed up, we might want to tell people how to clean

up and fix their lives. Or better we might want to tell people about Jesus' miracle power and his love to clean up our messes and to fix what's broken, and make life right for us. That can be better. It can be a wonderful, beautiful thing to tell people about Jesus' miracle power and love; it can be great to share that Jesus can clean up our messes and fix our broken and make life better for us. But Jesus is concerned about something more than how life is going for us. Jesus is especially concerned about our relationship with God, our broken relationship with God. Jesus didn't come just to make life easier for us, Jesus came to give us life with God. That means Jesus had to do something more than teach us how to live right. And he had to do something more than fix our world so we can have fun in the sun. Jesus came to reconcile us with God, to resolve God's judgment - "the soul that sins, it shall die." That's why Jesus didn't just teach behavior and do miracles, but Jesus went to the cross. Why? To take our place as guilty, to pay for our sin, to set us right with God ... to set us right to be blessed by God.

Some times we want to skip right to that "blessed by God" talk and skip over the sin and guilt talk. Why? Sin and guilt talk can be terribly personal, right? We'd rather talk about Jesus' miracles and love, what he can do for us to make life better. But sin and guilt is more consuming than cancer, more debilitating than a broken body, more destructive than tornadoes, more deadly than death. How so? When people try to hide and deny, when they try to blame and excuse, what happens? They leave a trail of crushed and broken hearts and lives. But with Jesus, you have for you, and you have for them, what guilty and crushed and torn hearts need to hear. You get to hear for yourself and tell

others how Jesus has taken your guilt and their guilt as his own. You get to hear for yourself and tell others how Jesus died for your sin and theirs. You get to hear for yourself and tell others how Jesus lives with this promise for you and for them: “Peace! Your sins are forgiven you. Peace! God has a place for you in his heart. With Jesus, you’re right by God and he will make life right for you.” And then we get to share all those promises about God’s love and care as true for me and true for you.

That’s why we’re here. In a world where life can be so broken, in a world where death can seem so all-powerful, we get to show and tell the truth about Jesus and all that Jesus has done for us.

That’s why I’m here. That’s why you’re here. I’m not saying we’ll all be like Peter and Paul speaking up before crowds. But the Spirit of Christ is at work setting us up to tell the most important thing that can ever be told - the truth, the Good Friday truth, the Easter truth, the life and the love of Jesus. And then, someday, Jesus will come back and take us to be with him. But now, he has left us here. “Why? Why are we here?”

That question is huge for me right now. Last month, you surprised me, reminding me that I’ve been here 25 years now. This past week, my doctor told me I’m not getting any younger. When we hit milestones, as we graduate from one day to another, one year to another, it’s good for us to ask ourselves - “Why? Why am I here?” Not just: “Am I enjoying myself?” Not just: “What do I want to be doing with my life?” But “Am I living God’s purpose for my life?” “How can I better live God’s

purpose for my life? How can I better help St. John to live God's purpose for us?" That's not just a question for me to think about. It's a question for all of us to think about. Why did Jesus leave us behind? Why does Jesus have us here?

A good, godly answer to those questions demands more honesty with ourselves than closing our eyes and ears. Those questions take more thinking than "whoo-dee-whoo-dee-whoo." They need more time than a snap of the fingers. It can be hard to look at ourselves - "How am I living God's purpose for my life?" It can be hard to think about - "What needs to change in my life? What do I need to change in my life to better live God's purpose?" It can take time to think and time to work it out. Time that we're not especially good at using.

But that's why God is giving us time, isn't it? Not just to get cozy and to make cozy. We're here to be part of the great things God is doing in Jesus. We're here to help people see Jesus. So what are you doing to help people see Jesus? Amen.

## THE SERVICE

**IN OUR WORLD TODAY ...** how many people in your circles know their purpose, their God-given purpose in life? How many are living their own purpose in life? How many know why they are here in this world? Here's where it can get dangerous - how many of those people who aren't living God's purpose are drawing you into their purpose for life? Here's where it may be sad - how many of those people (without godly purpose) are we attracting into God's purpose for life?

**IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ...** we see Jesus' purpose in life here and in heaven. And we see the purpose Jesus has for us while we are here.

### OPENING HYMN

*"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"*

**Hymn 472 vs. 1-4**

A hymn of glory let us sing! New songs throughout the world shall ring:  
Alleluia, alleluia! Christ, by a road before untrod,  
ascends unto the throne of God. Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

The holy apostolic band upon the Mount of Olives stand,  
Alleluia, alleluia! and with his followers they see  
their Lord ascend in majesty. Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

To them the shining angels cry, "Why stand and gaze upon the sky?"  
Alleluia, alleluia! "This is the Savior," thus they say.  
"This is his glorious triumph day." Alleluia, alleluia!  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

"You see him now, ascending high up to the portals of the sky."  
Alleluia, alleluia! "Hereafter Jesus you shall see  
returning in great majesty." Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia

### INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the T Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

## CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

CW 189

Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

**Blessed are they whose sin the Lord does not count against them.**

Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

**Almighty and merciful Father,**

**we have strayed from your ways like lost sheep.**

**We have followed what we have devised and desired in our hearts.**

**We have offended you and sinned against your holy law.**

**We have done those things that we should not have done,**

**and we have not done those things that we should have done.**

**Have mercy on us, Lord!**

**Spare us, forgive us, and restore us,**

**according to your promises in Christ Jesus.**

*Silence for meditation and reflection*

God, our merciful Father, has forgiven all our sins. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Redeemer and Savior. Jesus paid the penalty for our guilt by his death on the cross and freed us from death by his resurrection from the grave. We have peace with God now and forever. **Amen.**

## LORD, HAVE MERCY - SUNG

CW 190

In peace let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**

For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

**Lord, have mercy.**

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord, have mercy.**

Help, save, comfort, and defend us, gracious Lord. **Amen.**



## GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST - SUNG

CW 191

*Refrain:* Glory to God in the highest, glory to God, and peace to his people on earth, and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. You are seated at the right hand of the Father; receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Amen. *Refrain*

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord Jesus, King of glory, on this day you ascended far above the heavens, and at God's right hand you rule the nations. Leave us not alone, we pray, but grant us the Spirit of truth that, at your command and by your power, we may be your witnesses in all the world; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

## FIRST READING

*Acts 1:1-11*

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 instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them 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. 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."

Then they gathered around him and 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."

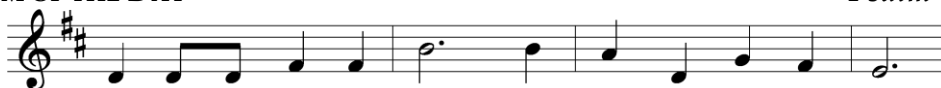
After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "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."

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

#### PSALM OF THE DAY

*Psalm 47D*



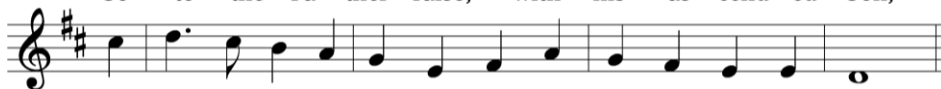
1 All peo - ples, clap your hands, and shout with joy and sing.  
2 God has gone up on high, with shout and trum - pet voice;  
3 No - bles from all the earth are joined with A - bram's seed;



The LORD Most High is to be feared; he is the earth's great King.  
sing praise to God, our glo - rious King, sing praise to him, re - joice!  
the rul - ers of the world are God's; he's lift - ed high in - deed!



He brings the na - tions down, sub - dues them in our sight;  
For God is King of all. Sing praise with all your skill;  
So to the Fa - ther raise, with his as - cend - ed Son,



he choos - es our in - her - it - ance; his love is Ja - cob's might.  
he sits up - on his ho - ly throne and rules the na - tions still.  
and Ho - ly Spir - it end - less praise, e - ter - nal Three in One.

## SECOND READING

*Ephesians 1:16–23*

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

*Matthew 28:20*

Alleluia! Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Alleluia!

## GOSPEL

*Luke 24:44–53*

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

#### HYMN OF THE DAY

*"Christ High-Ascended"*  
**Hymn 747**

Christ high-ascended, now in glory seated,  
throned and exalted, victory completed,  
death's dread dominion finally defeated, we are his witnesses.

Christ, from the Father ev'ry pow'r possessing,  
who on his chosen lifted hands in blessing,  
sends forth his servants, still in faith confessing, we are his witnesses.

Christ, who in dying won for us salvation,  
lives now the firstborn of the new creation;  
to win disciples out of ev'ry nation, we are his witnesses.

Christ in his splendor, all dominion gaining,  
Christ with his people evermore remaining,  
Christ to all ages, gloriously reigning, we are his witnesses.

As at his parting, joy shall banish grieving,  
faith in his presence strengthen our believing;  
filled with his Spirit, love and pow'r receiving, we are his witnesses.

#### SERMON

*Acts 1:1-11*

#### NICENE CREED

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

#### OFFERING PRAYER

Jesus, grant that the gifts we bring you each week may more and more show that we are just as diligent and just as interested in the Lord's business as we are our own business. **Amen.**

#### OFFERING

*If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.*



#### PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Ascended Lord, seated at the right hand of the Father, we rejoice in your rule. In wisdom you govern the kingdoms of this world. Bless all those in positions of authority. Lead them to confess that all power comes from you. Continue to work all things together for the good of your kingdom, and guard and protect us from all harm and danger.

When you ascended on high, you gave good gifts to us. We thank you for sending the apostles and evangelists to record your words and explain them in Scripture. Continue to provide pastors and teachers to guide and equip your people. Empower us to share your gospel with all nations. Direct us always to you for grace that will help us in our time of need. As our High Priest, continue to intercede for us with the Father when we pray in your name. [Bear before the Father our individual petitions, as we especially pray for . . . *here name the cause of the petition.*]

Lord Jesus, as you humbled yourself even to death on the cross before you were exalted on high, lead us through all our trials in patient and humble faith until you lift us up on high where you have gone to prepare a place for us.

On this festival day, we join the angels in rejoicing that you completed the work of salvation and returned to your glory. With those who gazed up toward heaven, lift up our hearts as we await your return. Come quickly and redeem our bodies as you have redeemed our souls. We praise and bless you, our victorious Savior. **Amen.**

#### **LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**

#### **THE SACRAMENT**

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)  
(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)

#### **PREFACE - SUNG**

**CW 199**

The Lord be with you.  
**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.  
**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**It is right to give him thanks and praise.**

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who by his willing sacrifice on the cross took away the sins of the world and by his glorious resurrection restored everlasting life. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY - SUNG**

**CW 200**

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full, full of your glory. Hosanna, hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna, hosanna in the highest. Hosanna, hosanna in the highest.

**WORDS OF INSTITUTION**

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my  $\tau$  body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my  $\tau$  blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.**

**JESUS, LAMB OF GOD - SUNG**

**CW 202**

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.  
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.  
Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us, grant us peace.

## DISTRIBUTION HYMN

## *"On Christ's Ascension I Now Build"*

Hymn 476

On Christ's ascension I now build the hope of my ascension.  
This hope alone has always stilled all doubt and apprehension,  
for where the head is, there as well I know his members are to dwell  
when Christ shall come and call them.

Since Christ returned to claim his throne, great gifts for me obtaining,  
my heart will rest in him alone, no other rest remaining,  
for where my treasure went before, there all my thoughts will ever soar  
to still their deepest yearning.

O grant, dear Lord, this grace to me, recalling your ascension,  
that I may serve you faithfully, in thanks for my redemption;  
and then, when all my days will cease, let me depart in joy and peace  
in answer to my pleading.

## CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
**his mercy endures forever.**

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,  
**we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**

O God the Father, source of all goodness, in your loving-kindness you sent  
your Son to share our humanity. We thank you that through him you have  
given us pardon and peace in this Sacrament. We also pray that you will  
not forsake us but will rule our hearts and minds by your Holy Spirit so  
that we willingly serve you day after day; through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and  
forever. **Amen.**



## BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

## CLOSING HYMN

*"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"*

**Hymn 472 vs. 5-6**

Be now our joy on earth, O Lord, and be our future great reward.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Then, throned with you forever, we shall praise your name eternally.

Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

O risen Christ, ascended Lord, all praise to you let earth accord.

Alleluia, alleluia!

You are, while endless ages run, with Father and with Spirit one.

Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

## Special Thanks

*We thank Monica Wintrone for her years of organ and piano playing at St. John.*

*We thank Louis Luedtke for playing trumpet for our Sunday Service.*

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