

50 Days Ablaze! Sermon Series 2
Sixth Mission Response – May 28, 2006
Acts 1:1-11
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“Celebrate” Sermon: “A Place for You”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Open your Bibles, if you will please, to Luke 24, verse 50, page ____ in the pew Bibles:

“When he [Jesus] had led them out of 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 worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple praising God.”

Talk about celebrating!

- 1. *They worshipped him.*** This is the first time in the Gospel that it speaks of the disciples worshipping Jesus—worshipping the Teacher, Rabbi, Master, Messiah . . . and now Savior . . . they had followed for nearly three years of life. They are finally worshipping HIM.
- 2. *They returned with great joy.*** No depressed disciples, no apathetic apostles, no joyless Jews here. They are joy-filled, and they are reacting to seeing the Divine enter again into daily life—something they had seen time and time again with Jesus and His ministry . . . the Divine enters the ordinary . . . and that produces great joy in the people of God.
- 3. *They stayed at the temple continually.*** Sounds a bit like the way that Jesus was received at the temple by a woman named Anna. She, too, stayed at the temple day and night, watching and waiting for the Messiah who was going to change the lives of His people.
- 4. *They praised God.*** They couldn’t help it. They finally got it. They finally grasped the opportunity . . . the ministry . . . the work . . . the fulfillment . . . the action of God in the working of Jesus the Christ.

Talk about celebrating! These people were celebrating! These are the very ingredients of “Celebration”—worshipping God with joy-filled lives of truth-seeking and temple-staying praise for Him alone! These people, these disciples, wanted to celebrate what had just happened. And what had just happened? It is an event that just happened in our lives, so to speak, this past Thursday: the 40th day after the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus—the Ascension of Jesus into heaven.

Luke here, at the conclusion of his Gospel about Jesus, gives us a taste of the Ascension from the apostles’ point of view. But today, when we are talking about “celebrate,” we want to

take another look at this great event as recorded in the next volume of Luke’s work called the Book of Acts. So take a look with me please at Acts chapter 1, on page ____.

We not only want to catch the feeling of what it means to “celebrate”—we want to understand some *reasons* to “celebrate.” This section of scripture—Acts 1, that speaks of the Ascension—gives us a good base to realize some amazing things to “celebrate” even today.

Would you follow along as I read 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 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. 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.’ 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.’”

This text implies that you and I should celebrate because **“You have a Place.”**

It’s so important to have a place isn’t it? Psychologically, we want to feel like we have a place to be, a place to belong, a place to call our own. That’s not just a physical place, like a home, but we want to fit . . . and feel like we are needed and loved. It’s the “Norm and Cheers” phenomenon—we want to have a place. Well, in this text, God is going to remind us and show us that we have a profound place because of what He did in Jesus Christ, our Savior. So the first reason we have to celebrate today is:

I. Celebrate—You have a place in the Kingdom of God!

The Kingdom of God was the content of the early Church’s preaching and teaching.

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they [people of Samaria] were baptized, both men and women.” (Acts 8:12)

“Paul entered the synagogue [in Ephesus] and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.” (Acts 19:8)

“Boldly and without hindrance he [Paul] preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus [in Rome].” (Acts 28:31)

These early members of the church wanted to preach and teach boldly about Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. This should not be such a surprising thing because Jesus, throughout most of his ministry, preached and taught about Himself and the kingdom of God many times. He used parables and people, trees and treasure, and many more things to illustrate a deeper and more meaningful kingdom of God. In fact, there are two ways that we should understand the phrase, “the kingdom of God,” and they both give us something real and deep to celebrate about even today:

A. Celebrate your place in the Kingdom of God –**Today in heaven!**

Remember . . . Jesus, on Ascension Day, ascended into heaven. Yet, in this section of Acts 1, Luke talks of Jesus speaking to them (in verse 3) about the kingdom of God and then (in verse 4), Luke reminds the readers of a meal that was shared the night Jesus was betrayed. From that time on Maundy Thursday night, Luke is pointing them toward the Holy Spirit and Pentecost but also remembers one thing that Jesus said that night about the Kingdom of God, John 14:1-4 . . .

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go there and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Jesus is speaking about heaven, and He is talking about how there are places in heaven that will be set aside for all believers. Now, notice that Jesus isn’t going to start making the rooms when He gets to heaven; rather, what He does in the next days after Maundy Thursday and Good Friday is what makes the rooms in heaven. It is Jesus’ death and resurrection that makes a place for all believers in heaven. And that assurance by faith is real for us today!

There is a teaching that asks the question: “If you die today, do you know without a doubt that you will go to heaven?” I know there are some who will say that they are not sure or simply don’t yet know. But for the believer, the answer to that question is “Yes!” Remember dear ones, sins are forgiven by Christ . . . eternal life is opened by Christ . . . and people are saved by Jesus Christ. Celebrate! Because of Jesus and His death and resurrection, we have the assurance of heaven today! There is a place for you in heaven because you know the way—Jesus Christ.

There is also a second reason to celebrate about the Kingdom of God and that is:

B. Celebrate your place in the Kingdom of God – **Today in life!**

Please, brothers and sisters in Christ, don't miss that the kingdom of God is not just a far-off goal. Don't miss that the kingdom of God is not just a "someday destination." The kingdom of God is right here and right now.

When Jesus was teaching and preaching in ministry, He would heal people and halt storms, change tax collectors and raise children from the dead, and He would feed five thousand and forgive men on mats. These were all signs for the people that the kingdom of God was among them.

God was working in the midst of people. He wasn't a far-off God that was waiting for people just to cross the finish line, having nothing else to do with life, learning, decisions and disease. God is here! He is here among this fallen world to seek and save the lost, still today. He is here! The kingdom of God is among us! Take a look at Luke 17:20-21:

"One day the Pharisees asked Jesus, 'When will the Kingdom of God come?' Jesus replied, 'The Kingdom of God isn't ushered in with visible signs. You won't be able to say, 'Here it is!' or 'It's over there!' For the Kingdom of God is among you.'"

The kingdom of God is no longer just Israel as it once was thought to be. That idea is what prompted the disciples' question in Acts 1:6. Rather, the kingdom of God is among the people of God everywhere. And just because Jesus ascended into heaven, that doesn't mean that the people of God and the people of the world are left to live without the care, compassion, working, and constant influence of the God that created and redeemed them. God is still with us and working in our lives all the time. The effects of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its life-changing message are seen all around us daily, if we in faith have "eyes to see and ears to hear."

I know and have experienced, just like you, that sin is around us in disease and death, in disaster and destruction, in economic depression and disgusting daily decisions. But Jesus died on the cross, and that message is changing the world even among us today. We, by faith, are now redeemed and see how God redeems even the worst of situations to bring about His message and glory through it all! God is still working today among us in powerful ways.

God is working among us, and that should give us cause to celebrate, for we are His people! Celebrate, people of God, this day—for we have a place in the kingdom of God, today in life and forever, because of what Jesus has done on the cross of Calvary!

Yet we have still another reason to celebrate:

II. Celebrate - You have a place in the mission of God!

Let me take you back to Acts 1 again. Take a look at verse 8:

“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.”

Jesus is telling them about the Pentecost event that will happen on the 50th day after the resurrection of our Lord. These believers will receive power, and the event will unfold in Jerusalem where the preaching of Jesus and what He has done will take place in many languages and dialects according to the Spirit.

Now don't miss something. Notice the last phrases that Jesus says to the followers at that point: *“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

This is nothing short of a version of the Great Commission being told again by Jesus, lest the disciples forget after the 40 days of time that they have shared with the resurrected Rabbi, Lord Jesus. They have a mission now to be a part of. They have a message now to get out and share! They have a Messiah to proclaim, and they are not to keep it in but share it even to the ends of the earth.

It is because of that message of Jesus Christ and “Him crucified” that we are here today. And it is by the prompting of the Spirit who has called and gathered us by the gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctified us in the one true faith, and has kept us in that true faith to this day and, in His working, even to the end of our lives. So, having received this message of Jesus and what He has done, we need celebrate now *our place* in the mission.

A. Celebrate your place in the mission – **Both as a building block and as a body!**

For the last seven weeks we have talked about the mission and the message and the Messiah. We have reveled in what God has done in our midst in this church. We have been led to understand that God has called us each individually into the mission of proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ.

1. God has given us His Spirit.
2. God has given us gifts.
3. God has given us power.
4. Most importantly, God has given us the greatest message of Jesus to proclaim.

Also remember that He has given and called us to be in mission together as a body of believers in Christ. Ephesians 4:11-16 says it so well:

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed

back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

We each have individual gifts and passions and talents, given and nurtured by the Spirit. But sometimes it seems that even by my actions there is “an eye” over here doing things on its own; over there is “a pancreas” wanting to live all alone; over here is “a big toe;” and still over there is “a knee cap” trying to get along on its own. Why? I know we live in an individual-minded age, but God has brought us into a different-minded community that sacrifices and loves each other.

See, God uses us as “building blocks,” joining us together and forming a Body that has one cohesive message and mission for the whole world. That is one reason why this *Ablaze!* movement is such an awesome thing. We as a church body, along with other church bodies around the globe, are partnering together to reach 100 million people for Jesus by 2017. It is not just Pastor Jason; it is not just St. Luke; it is not just the Eastern District; and it is not just the Missouri Synod—but many other partner churches around the world as well.

Realize again that each person is needed. Every part is needed for the body to function. As Paul would say, we want the body to GROW and BUILD itself up. We want to do both. We want to “make and mature.” We want as a body of believers to reach out into the world—individually and as a body—to reach people for Jesus. And in that mission, you definitely have a place! You are needed. You are wanted. There is a place for you in God’s mission today. Celebrate that!

Now having realized all this, there is one last thing to celebrate about. And really it’s found in verse 1 as a “given” in the Acts 1 account:

“In my former book Theophilus, I wrote about all that that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven.”

Luke wrote about **what Jesus has done and taught!** These are but a few words in just one verse of Acts—but with profound meaning. It points us to another foundational point of celebration:

III. Celebrate—Jesus died and rose in your place!

This is the very foundation of celebration in Christ.

Last week in a testimony about the mission trip she had been on, Leda said it so well with what she would call “the Great Exchange.” Her words:

- My brokenness for His wholeness.

- My weakness for His strength.
- My turmoil for His peace.

The list goes on and on . . .

- My conditional love for God's unconditional love.
- My impatience for God's enduring patience.
- My lack of control for God's perfect control.

God does it all. He takes the broken, sinful, and shameful and gives us the perfect, whole, and righteous. Another writer you might know—Isaiah—once said something to the effect that: *“He took our punishment, our pain, and He gave us His peace.”*

Jesus has taken our sin, and in its place He gave salvation. The cross . . . the disconnection with the Father . . . the reality of eternal death . . . the descending into hell itself . . . are places that you and I need never go to because Jesus, our Savior, took our place. **And because of Him—Jesus alone—we have a place in the kingdom of God and a place in the mission of God today!** That is worth celebrating! In Jesus Name, Amen.