

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/19/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Yesterday, (May 18th this year) was Ascension Day. This is the festival in which the Church commemorates JESUS bodily ascension into heaven as recorded primarily in Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:8-9. It is celebrated on the fortieth day after Easter and ten days before Pentecost. It never falls on a Sunday, so most churches don't observe it in worship unless they opt to have an Ascension Sunday service or a special service on the Thursday of Ascension Day.

I like reading the Acts narrative of the ascension, especially including the verse that immediately follow:

“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.”

Here are the disciples, just having been told that they will be witnesses for CHRIST, standing there looking up at the sky. It takes two angels to show up and say, “What are you standing around for? HE told you what to do. Go do it!” Those instructions from JESUS are spelled out more clearly in Matthew 28:18-20:

Then JESUS came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to ME. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the FATHER and of the SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

JESUS' final instructions to HIS followers is to go evangelize the world. “Evangelism” means “the spreading of the Christian gospel (the good news about JESUS) by public witness.” It means telling others about GOD'S love as taught and revealed by JESUS during HIS time on earth. And it is to be done to those who do not know. Talking to each other, to fellow members of the congregation, is not evangelism. Evangelism is about making new disciples by reaching out to those who do not know about JESUS.

Unfortunately, many congregations in America today are basically doing what the disciples were after the ascension: standing around and looking up and waiting for JESUS to show up again. That's not what our LORD intended. HE wanted us to look for opportunities to talk to others about our faith so that they might come to know what GOD wants to offer to all people. Many of us are believers today because someone, usually a family member, brought us to church. At the time that happened, most people were somehow connected to a church, or at least knew what they were rejecting when they didn't go. Today, however, there are so many in our own neighborhoods and even families who don't know. The challenge for us is to quit standing around and looking up. We have to quit just waiting for

JESUS to do something. HE already has. HE has given us the good news of GOD'S love. HE has equipped us with the teachings of the scriptures. And HE has provided us with the power of the HOLY SPIRIT that can guide us and lead us into the exciting mission of making CHRIST known. So, why are we just standing and looking up?

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey