

Sermon for 5-12-24
Text: Luke 24:44-53

Grace and peace to you from Jesus Christ, our ascended Lord and Savior.
Amen.

On Ascension Day, celebrated forty days after Easter, which was this past Thursday (though we're celebrating it today), Jesus ascends into the clouds after leaving the eleven disciples with instructions. Jesus opens their minds for the last time to understand all of the scriptures – the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms.

It's encouraging to know that the disciples had to have Jesus teach them again and again, showing us that **knowing the scripture and truly understanding it are not the same thing**. We all need Jesus as our teacher and guide to truly understand and have our minds opened to receiving the message of scripture.

It's also encouraging to know that these disciples, who struggled to follow Jesus—who denied him, abandoned him at the cross, and huddled together in a room in fear after his resurrection—are the people whom Jesus trusts to carry on his ministry and to share it with the world. Either he has confidence in their potential, or he has confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit. Probably a bit of both!

After opening their minds to the scriptures, Jesus gives them their instructions:

Stay here.

Receive the gift of power from high.

Be witnesses.

This is what the disciples are to do as they move into a new role:

becoming the church and spreading the story of Jesus far and wide, to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.

So what does it mean to be church? We continue in the tradition of Jesus' disciples. We are planted in a particular community – for us here at St. Mark Lutheran Church, we are here in Circle Pines, here in the Twin Cities, here in Minnesota, and here in the United States.

This is our mission field, the place in which we were planted to be the church in this particular places. This particular church has been planted here, spending almost 70 years (70 this summer!) sharing the story of Jesus' life and love with our neighbors near and far.

We too are blessed with the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus tells the disciples, we too are clothed with power from on high. Jesus gives the disciples and us this gift. We aren't in it alone.

What does it mean to be church?

It means that we are not church alone! We have the power of the Holy Spirit to sustain us, to clothe us, and to empower us. The Holy Spirit is the fuel that drives the engine of the church – guiding us, encouraging us, and nurturing us in our work as the witnesses in the world.

And witnesses we are – witnesses to the story of Jesus. We hear the story in worship, the story of Jesus' life and ministry, the story of the Bible and God's people's struggles in the promised land. And we also are witnesses to the power of God's love in our lives. We all likely have stories we could share about connections made at church. Of a card sent after a loved one died or while we were recovering from illness. Of meals brought to our home or rides given to the doctor's office. Phone calls and messages to check in. Stories of encouragement and support.

In my conversations with many of you recently, you shared how St. Mark people care for one another in hard times. When things get difficult, St. Mark steps up!

And it is because we are the church together that we want to be witnesses in the world – witnesses to the love of God, to the story of Jesus.

I attended our Saint Paul Area Synod assembly yesterday, which is a gathering of the more than 100 congregations in the St. Paul Area that are part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. There were around 350 people there, doing the business of the church and celebrating the wonderful ways the Holy Spirit is moving in our Synod.

William Siong—pastor in seminary together 20 years ago

2010, started a new Lutheran Hmong congregation with the support of local churches (started with 20 people)

Several years ago, Tim did a short interim at Hope Lutheran located East Side of St. Paul. One of his favorite memories is attending a potluck hosted by the Hmong congregation and trying all the great food.

Thriving at the time

365 members signed the charter recently!

The power of the Holy Spirit makes this work possible. It is only because we are clothed in the power of the Holy Spirit that the church is able to continue being the church and witness to Jesus' love and the importance of Jesus' story. And we are invited to be those witnesses. We are the church together, and it is through our love of Jesus that we can be powerful witnesses to Christ and the story of Jesus.

I pray that we might be able to go out into the world hearing the words of Jesus to the disciples who will help birth the movement that becomes the church.

Stay here – Receive the gift of power – and be witnesses. That's what the church can do. Be rooted in your community. Know that the Holy Spirit empowers and guides us in our work. And be witnesses – share the love of Jesus and the stories of faith! And that is how we can be church together – worshipping Jesus and rejoicing for all the blessings that God has given us! We are sent out into the world for the love of the world. Thanks be to God! Amen!