

**“Get Your Head Out of the Clouds!”**

**Rev. Becky Stephens**

**Text:                    Luke 24:44-53**

**God’s Word:        Luke 3:18-19**

**Luke 24:44-53**

*Then he said, “When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, “Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’ You are witnesses of all these things.*

*“And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.”*

*The Ascension*

*Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. So they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all of their time in the Temple, praising God.*

I have a tendency to daydream. It’s something I’ve done since I was very young, probably longer than I remember. Though, I attribute my daydreaming tendencies to my sixth grade class, which also happens to be my earliest memory of daydreaming. Mr. Powell’s class was arranged in such a way that I was sitting in the row along the big wall of windows. It was very easy for me to turn my head just the slightest bit and get a great view of everything that was happening outside.

So that’s exactly what I did, often, checking out of whatever was going on in Mr. Powell’s room, ignoring the obnoxious cooty-boy across the aisle from me, and daydreaming about whatever was going on outside...wishing I could be there. It’s something I still do, even to this day; whether staring out the window of my office when I’m trying to write a sermon, or staring off into space when I’m tired, my

mind often wanders off. And if anyone happens to be around, before I know it, that person is waving their hand in front of my face or saying, “Get your head out of the clouds!”

For ages, artists have made great efforts to depict the Ascension of our Lord in paintings. Some of those paintings have been rather comical, with images of Jesus’ feet dangling from beneath a mass of clouds. And in all of those paintings, the disciples were looking up; one or two of them might have even been thinking to themselves, “Come on, Jesus, and get your head out of the clouds!” But the thing is Jesus’ ascension was about much more than his vertical locomotion to the heavens!

Out of the ten verses we read this morning, only half of one tells us about Jesus going up into heaven. The importance of the ascension lies in the words that Jesus says to his disciples before he goes anywhere. He knows that if anyone needs grounding, it’s them. Jesus knows that if there’s anyone that needs to get their heads out of the clouds, it’s the disciples.

After his Resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples. And after those 40 days the disciples were starting to get a little restless. They were wondering what was going to happen now that Christ had been resurrected, so they started asking questions. They wanted to know what the next step was. They were wondering when Jesus the Messiah would restore the kingdom of Israel as God had always promised his people he would do. So, as Jesus prepares to ascend to heaven, he gives the disciples some direction. Our reading this morning tells us that “[Jesus] opened their mind to understand the scriptures, 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, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’”

As the disciples were waiting for Jesus to do something great, he pointed right back at them and told them it was their turn. He said, “*You are witnesses.*” And that includes us; that includes where we are right this minute! Right here in Bucyrus, Ohio. This place is included in Jesus’ commission. We are to be God’s witnesses here! The promise of the Holy Spirit, the “*power from on high*” as Jesus calls it, is a promise for this community and a promise for this time, and a promise for this church!

Just when the disciples were busying themselves with wonder about what would happen next, just when it would have been so easy for them to get distracted by all that was going on around them, just when they could have spent the next several

hours with their heads in the clouds wondering where exactly Jesus disappeared to, Jesus' words bring them, and us, back down to earth again! "*Get your head out of the clouds! You've got work to do!*" The terrible temptation that disciples of Jesus face is that it is so easy to get lazy thinking that Christ will sort everything out when he returns. We even go to great lengths predicting when exactly Christ will return, perhaps so we don't have to do any "real" work!

In 2010, the head of The Family Radio Broadcasting Network, Harold Camping, predicted, through 2,000 billboards worldwide, that on May 21, 2011 the righteous, which totaled 3 percent of humanity, was to be whisked away to heaven, leaving the rest of us to weather five months of extreme natural disasters until October 21, 2011, whereupon God was to destroy the entire universe and everyone in it. Camping claimed to have "infallible, absolute proof" that this was going to happen, and that there was no point in making plans for Memorial Day Weekend. Sadly, quite a number of people bought into it, selling their possessions and paying big money for billboards.

Of course, predicting exactly when Christ will return is nothing new. For example, Preacher Samuel S. Snow predicted Jesus would return on October 22, 1844. Thousands of people gave away all their possessions, only to be surprised when the world did not end. That day came to be known as "The Great Disappointment." In 1806 news of Christ's return came by means of a hen in Leeds, England, who had been laying eggs that bore the message "Christ is coming." Thus, she was named The Prophet Hen of Leeds. Apparently, great numbers of people came to visit the spot where this hen was laying these eggs. And many people suddenly became extremely religious as they prayed fervently and repented of their evil ways. But, as it is written, "some gentlemen, hearing of the matter, went one fine morning, and caught the hen in the act of laying one of her miraculous eggs. Close by was a young lad inscribing the words on the egg with a pen and ink."

Moving forward in history, in his 1996 book *The Planet Earth 2000 A.D.* Hal Lindsey, who has been making big money predicting the end of the world since his 1970 best-selling book *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, wrote that Christians should not make any plans after the year 2000. And Pat Robertson said on a broadcast of *The 700 Club*, "I guarantee you by October or November of 1982 there is going to be a judgment on the world." Robertson later acknowledged, "I have a relatively good track record," but, "sometimes I miss."

Jesus knew the disciples' concerns. Jesus knew they would watch in wonder as he ascended into heaven and then begin to worry about when he would return in final

glory. And so he had one last conversation with them. *“This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”*

In a legal sense, a witness is a person who, because of some experience they have had or something they have seen, is in a unique position to tell the truth about some important matter. And Jesus commissions his disciples to witness to God’s mighty acts in history, to proclaim Christ’s Good News in an empire that has crucified good news. They’ve been called into a proverbial courtroom to witness about Jesus Christ amid the competing testimonies—testimonies that promise peace through violence, fulfillment through wealth, and power through exploitation! And they aren’t to do this on their own; they are only to do this through the power and the prompting of the Holy Spirit living inside them.

Luke’s Gospel makes it clear that the Holy Spirit’s work is made manifest in the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave an outline of the Holy Spirit’s work in Luke Chapter 4 when Jesus read from the scroll: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”* And here, at the end of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus promises that same Spirit of God to come upon us! Jesus is no longer physically here to heal the sick and to feed the hungry, so the mission of Jesus now falls to the disciples. Jesus tells his disciples, immediately before he is *“lifted up”*, that it is their job to take his message global—*“to the ends of the earth.”*

And this is the mission of the Church, of which each of us is a part. Hearing this can be staggering. Bearing witness to Christ in a world that suffers is overwhelming. How can our community, let alone the world ever be free from poverty and hunger? But that’s exactly what Jesus is preparing his disciples for.

It’s as if he anticipated their question, “How will we do this, Lord?” when he said, *“Look, I’m sending to you what my Father promised, but you are to stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”* Christ’s disciples have a clear mission, he’s given us the power of the Holy Spirit, and Christ tells us to get going!

A prayer that is attributed to Teresa of Avila goes like this: *“God of love, help us to remember that Christ has no body now on earth but ours, no hands but ours, no*

*feet but ours. Ours are the eyes to see the needs of the world. Ours are the hands with which to bless everyone now. Ours are the feet with which [Jesus] is to go about doing good.*” We are to be the hands, the feet, the eyes, and the voice of Christ as we reach out to a lost, broken, and dying world. There is no bigger job to be done; there is no more important job in all the world, and there is no greater privilege to which we can be called!

It would be a strange sight to see a man ascending toward the heavens. And it can be more than intimidating to think about telling a scared and unbelieving world about the love and mercy of God which defies even the greatest powers. But we need to get our heads out of the clouds, we need to stop wondering and worrying because things are looking up. Like those disciples so many years ago, we are to go from this place with joy; worshipping, praising, and preaching good news to the poor, release for the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and liberation to the oppressed! We are to do this here in Bucyrus, OH, in Columbus, in all of the United States and to the ends of the earth. May we indeed be witnesses to all nations, beginning right here!