

**Easter 7C- Ascension Observed**  
**Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church**  
**Lakeland, FL**  
**May 29, 2022**

**Acts 1:1-11**  
**Psalm 97**  
**Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21**  
**Luke 24:44-53**

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

Please pray with me – May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The text for our meditation today is this verse from our first reading from the Book of Acts:  
*...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)*

On August 21, 2017, I was in Greenville, SC with 50 other people. We selected this place because it offered spectacular viewing of an event I had long-awaited. We brought musical instruments. We had our cameras. There was bread and wine for the Holy Table. Some rested and others prayed. There was a labyrinth to walk. And then, it was almost imperceptible – the light began to grow dim and the shadows of the leaves on the ground took on an unusual shape so that they looked like crescent moons. Then the crickets started chirping and the birds took to their nests. The street lights came on. And at around 2:35, the sun was totally eclipsed by the moon. At last, I was standing in the midst of a phenomenon I could only imagine in the weeks and months and years preceding it. For 2 minutes we were in totality. I will never forget what I witnessed that day.

Some of us stood silently. Others clasped hands and stared into each other's faces with amazement and wonder. We put on the protective glasses and basked in the awe of the moments. And as totality passed, we gathered around the makeshift altar for Holy Communion recognizing that we were standing in a thin place – that place where the veil between the ordinary and the divine is amazingly thin and we are bathed with an incomprehensible sense of the holy displayed in God's good creation. We were witnesses.

I'd like for you to consider another scene of wonder. The disciples are walking along with Jesus, just like they had before. The excitement of his resurrection has kind of worn off -- it's been 7 weeks after all. They gather around for another Q&A session with their Master. "Is this the time that you will restore the kingdom of Israel?" they ask, still not grasping the magnitude of what had happened, how all of creation was changed and that the restoration of the Kingdom of David was not the purpose of Jesus' life and death and resurrection. And Jesus responds, not answering their question directly but telling them important news – "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria (even Samaria) and to the end of the earth." And while he answers, he begins to rise up into the

sky and disappears for good. They're amazed and astounded, and they just keep watching where they saw him disappear, a tiny speck in the sky.

There they were, staring, mouths agape. Finally, a couple of angels come along. "Why are you standing looking up to heaven?" they said. "Jesus will return."

What had they just witnessed? In fact, what was it that they had witnessed over the last three years? The healings, the feedings, the teaching, the miracles – even the wind and the sea obeyed him. Not to mention, of course, the resurrection. Amazing.

Now, the word "witness" is very interesting. To witness something is to see or otherwise observe it happening. I was a witness to the eclipse. The disciples were witnesses to the ascension. But that's not all that "witness" can mean. To witness can also mean testifying to that which one has observed; telling others about it. And it is that meaning that Jesus intended when he told the disciples that they would be his witnesses, they would tell of what they had experienced and seen and heard; they would be witnesses to the world as they knew it.

To witness is to observe and then to tell. As I told you of my experience of the eclipse, I was right back there again, living it a second time – singing, praying, resting, communing together. But, not everything must be as grand as a total solar eclipse. There are also those days of being particularly aware of the beauty of God's creation. And that time when a new acquaintance went out of her way, way out of her way to wish me a "Happy Birthday." In each of these, God speaks of God's love for me and for you and for the world. And it is my great joy to be able to speak of these things with you. I am a witness.

My friends, you too are called to be a witness. You are called by Jesus to witness to his love and grace poured into your life. To be a witness means that we are to be aware of, to notice, to be on the lookout for the ways that Jesus is touching our lives. Is it in a small and unexpected kindness? – a door held open, a smile returned, a plate of cookies? Maybe it is in something bigger – perhaps encouragement from a loved one as you were suffering with a disease or life trauma. That loved one was being Jesus' presence in your life during that time. Will you witness to that?

My friend Carl who was in confirmation class when I was on internship posted this on Facebook yesterday and I share it with his permission. "A lady with three teeth sat down next to me on a bench in Atlantic City where I was vacationing. She slapped her hands on her knees, and asked how I was doing. I told her I wasn't half bad and asked her how she was. She said she was sore from getting five tattoos in six days and she showed me all of them. She was most proud of her fresh NASCAR one on her right calf. I would have kept conversing with her about her tattooing but her husband yelled for her to come over and sit next to his slot machine."

A seemingly benign and uneventful exchange, right? But in that brief conversation, two people who didn't know each other, two people who couldn't be more different from each other, had a

life-giving exchange. And in that, Jesus was honored because of the dignity and interest each showed the other. Each of them were witnesses – that is, observers and speakers – of God’s love poured out in amazing ways upon God’s people.

Now, we have all been witnesses in recent weeks of things that we wish we had never seen, things too terrible for words, things that reflect only the worst of humanity. And, as I mentioned during Evening Prayer this week, a friend messaged me and asked “How do you keep your faith in the midst of all of this?” And as a witness of Jesus’ love, I could respond to her.

“Sometimes I don't know how. You know of some of the times that I have shaken my fist at God. You can imagine my impatience with those who piously say, "Well, God is in control" and suggest in other ways that this massacre was the result of God's will. So this is a bit about how I keep my faith -- I remember that in the waters of my baptism God has drawn me into relationship with God and with others. I remember that God sent Jesus to love the world, that is, the ‘cosmos,’ and to redeem us all. I remember that God is love and that which does not reflect love is not of God. And I look out to see God's love reflected throughout creation and loving relationships.

Now, I must say that I have argued with God about why the actions of evil and death and disease were not stopped by God's almighty power. And then I run into that whole "free will" thing. I keep my faith because it is the only thing that I can run to and hold on to when all else is crumbling. And in all of those times, God shows up every single time.”

My answer to her was not particularly persuasive, may not have even been up to snuff theologically, but it was born of my experience. This week, my friends, I ask you to put your antennas way up, to be especially attuned to how God shows up in your life today and in the past. Be aware of ladies with three teeth and lots of tattoos. Be aware of the times that your jaw dropped at the beauty of creation? When has your heart pounded at the love shown to you by another, love that flows from God’s love? Make note of these times – they are priceless. You might jot a quick note in a notebook or in a journal or in a square on a calendar. Or you might stop for a time of meditation and prayer as you contemplate this. And then store it away to draw from when you have an opportunity to witness to what God has done, is doing and will continue to do.

Thanks be to God.