



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

The
Ascension of
Jesus

The Holy
Spirit brings
clarity and
unity

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

To Love like
Jesus

2016

May

Session 1 – The Ascension of Jesus

Welcome to the first midweek session for the month of May. During this month we celebrate Ascension Day and Pentecost. In our first two sessions we will take an in-depth look at both of these events and the corresponding activity of the Holy Spirit. In the final session for the month, we will focus on the love given through the Holy Spirit.

Luke describes Jesus's ascension both in His Gospel and in the Book of Acts. Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after He resurrected from the grave. The days between Resurrection Sunday and Ascension Day were a time when Jesus proved to the disciples that He was indeed the resurrected Son of God, who was no longer dead but alive just as He had said. In fact, he appeared to over 500 brethren at one time according to 1 Corinthians 15:6. However, let's think for moment about how the disciples reacted to Jesus's death on Good Friday. They were sad and hopeless. They retreated into hiding unsure of what was going to happen, even though their Teacher had told them He was going to rise on the third day. Compare that to what Luke wrote in his Gospel after Jesus had ascended: "And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52). This signifies the power of the resurrection and the great impact Jesus's post-resurrection appearances had on the disciples. Their sadness was turned into joy, and their fear was transformed into a great sense of anticipation of what was to come and what they were going to do.

Just prior to His ascension, Jesus led His disciples out to Bethany and the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. From there He commanded His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they received the power of the Holy Spirit. When the disciples tried to question Jesus about when He would restore the kingdom of Israel, He focused them on their mission instead of providing an exact timeframe for His return. Jesus said "...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). After saying these words, Jesus ascended into heaven. Putting together Luke's accounts from both his gospel and Acts, the following happened. First, Jesus raised His hands and blessed His disciples. Then while His disciples were watching Him, Jesus ascended into the sky where He was received into a cloud and hidden from their sight. Then, as they were still looking up to the heavens, two men stood by them in white apparel and asked them why they were just standing there looking up into the sky. Then the men told the disciples that "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

In order to fulfill the challenge of the Great Commission, the disciples would need the power from the Holy Spirit to testify to all about what they had experienced and to share the Gospel with them. The Holy Spirit would only come after Jesus had returned to His place in heaven next to His Father. Therefore, Jesus's ascension had present and future implications. Presently, Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God where He intercedes for us. In the future, the second coming of Christ will occur the same way Jesus ascended.

The book of Acts tells us that when the 11 disciples returned to Jerusalem they stayed in the upper room and that they "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus and with His brothers" (Acts 1:14). As mentioned earlier from the Gospel of Luke, after the Lord ascended, the disciples "worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God." Their worship of Jesus signifies that the disciples had, at last, recognized Jesus for who He is. Their return and waiting in Jerusalem was an obedient response to what Jesus directed them to do. Their constant presence in the temple tells how they remained in "one accord in prayer and supplication" with a greater group of followers. Incredibly this same group of men, who hid themselves away just a few weeks prior, was now openly praying together in the temple with great joy.

In the ten days between the Lord's ascension and the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit, the disciples obeyed, prayed, waited, and united. They were all in one accord because they were able to set aside personal feelings and commit themselves to one task – witnessing to others about Jesus Christ and the salvation that comes from believing in Him. The Holy Spirit would provide them all with the power to fulfill that mission. The fellowship they shared with the resurrected Jesus allowed them to await the promise of God with joy.

Today we are waiting for Jesus to return, and we can prepare ourselves for that moment by doing the same as the disciples. By, obeying God's Word, constantly praying, anticipating His return, and being united with our fellow believers in the mission to share the Gospel with the world, we move ourselves closer to the moment of our own ascension.

Session 2 – Pentecost: The Holy Spirit brings clarity and unity

Welcome back! In the previous session we discussed Ascension Day, and today we'll focus on the feast of Pentecost. Each Pentecost reminds us of the original Pentecost when the Apostles and all those who were waiting together were filled with the Holy Spirit and immediately began preaching Christ's Gospel. Imagine how the people felt after hearing that first sermon conducted by Apostle Peter. They were so moved that they asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Apostle Peter advised them to repent and turn to God and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. On this most recent Pentecost Sunday, we were also given instructions for "what we shall do" in our time: give thanks to God, the Holy Spirit, and allow Him to lead us. This is done by living and walking in the Spirit. Let us go deeper into this understanding.

What does it mean to live in the Holy Spirit? **To live in the Spirit** means that we live *through* the Spirit, that is to say, it is only by the Spirit that we have divine life at all. Without the activity of the Holy Spirit, we could never have true access to fellowship with God. In 1 Corinthians 12:3, Apostle Paul explains to the congregation that "...no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." Only the Holy Spirit can produce belief in Jesus Christ, which is necessary for eternal life. After believing in Christ, then life is poured into our souls through the rebirth of water and the Spirit. The **power** of the Holy Spirit then dwells enduringly within sealed believers, if we allow it, and makes it possible for the fruit of the Spirit (such as love, joy, peace, and longsuffering) to grow there. But we have to struggle with ourselves to give the Holy Spirit room to work in us and to reveal these gifts. This is not automatic.

Living in the Spirit flourishes with our sealing; the Holy Spirit also provides nourishment for the divine life within us. He provides the word in the divine services, which gives us direction, counsel, clarity. The Holy Spirit also provides for the consecration of the bread and wine for Holy Communion and allows us to partake in the body and blood of Christ. Without the word and sacrament, the divine life within us could not grow and thrive.

Finally, living in the Spirit provides us clarity and truth. Spiritual clarity is important in order to see ourselves and our surroundings properly. How does this all begin? When we allow the Holy Spirit to move and direct us, we begin to see with spiritual clarity God's plan of salvation. He also helps us in our daily life to make wise spiritual and natural decisions.

So, while living in the Spirit joins believers through Holy Baptism into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13) and through Holy Sealing into the bridal congregation, it is by **walking in the Spirit** that we are truly unified. Walking in the Spirit means that we choose to allow Him to guide us in all circumstances of life because we love Him so much. This is unifying in that though we each walk a unique and personalized path, our goal is the same and the urgings of the Holy Spirit are the same. He desires to unite us with our Heavenly Father and our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

What does the Spirit direct us to do to achieve this goal? First of all, He instructs us to nurture the divine life within us by supplying our soul with the food it needs in the divine services. Secondly, the Spirit instructs us to pray. Our prayer life must show our deep trust and hope in our Heavenly Father. When we pray we are convinced that God has heard our prayers and that He will act. David often stated in the Psalms to trust the Lord. In Psalm 62:8 David states: "Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us." Apostle Paul in Romans 15:13 (NIV) also encourages us, saying: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit will also direct our prayers even when we ourselves are unsure of what to say. According to Romans 8:26: "...the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Walking in the Spirit also unifies us in that the Spirit urges us to dedicate our lives to serving Jesus Christ and our fellow man. Dedicating our lives does not mean we despise our earthly life but rather know how to treasure and enjoy it. We use every day to gain victories over evil, and we use our gifts in order to serve others as Jesus did because we love Him.

Jesus explains in John 10:10 that He “[came] that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” He wants us to experience the fullness of joy in life that comes from doing what God has gifted us to do, and the Spirit will also direct us in this.

Lastly, walking in the Spirit unifies us in the longing for the Lord to return. We hear through the ministering of the Apostles the call of the Holy Spirit: Come! Our entire life is filled with the plea from Revelation 22:17: “Come, Lord Jesus!” By setting our focus on this, the differences that divide us fade and our unique, personal qualities become beautiful facets of a unified bridal congregation.

Next time, in our final session of May, we will go deeper into how we can look past our differences and love each other as Christ has loved us.

Session 3 – To Love like Jesus

Welcome back! In the first divine service of May, we heard about God’s love that has been poured into us by the Holy Spirit. In this session, we’re going to further discuss this love and how we can demonstrate it in our lives.

In Leviticus 19:18, God told Moses that “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus references this Old Testament commandment in Mark 12:30-31: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. ...You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Then Jesus goes a step further to say: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). The Old Testament commandments could be done with **our** love, bound by our humanity. Jesus’s new commandment can only be done with the power of the Holy Spirit. It is more than a call to love our neighbor; it is a call to love them as *Jesus loves us*. This requires us to first understand exactly how He loves us.

Jesus sacrificed His life in order to provide us with eternal life; He took on our sin so that we could have a path of reconciliation with God. His sacrificial love is pure and holy, unblemished by selfishness. Jesus’s love is the foundation of our relationship with Him. In 1 John 4:19 we read, “We love Him because He first loved us.” Out of His Spirit, we can love Him back. His love is the foundation, and when we consider what He did out of His love for us, then we know what our relationships with others must be like.

Loving someone as Jesus loves us is not something we can generate ourselves. In order to love like Jesus, we need help. Romans 5:5 tells us, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

The Holy Spirit gives us the power to love like Christ. This love has been poured into us, and in order for it to expand in our hearts, we **must** give it room to grow. With the power of the Spirit, we have the strength to begin to love like Christ. When we love like Christ, we can look beyond faults and differences to see people as **He** sees them: each worthy of love and salvation.

Jesus’s sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice, demonstrated His love for us. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to follow His example of this kind of love. We can never equal the sacrifice of Christ, but when we sacrifice for others our time, conveniences in our lives, or even our egos, we show that we love them as Jesus loves us. A sacrificial love is pure because it is not something we do for ourselves; it is only done in love for God and our neighbor.

If we are willing to give up something for our neighbor out of love, unity flourishes between us. Unity is defined as being joined together as a whole or coming together for a common purpose or action. Our congregation should be united for a common purpose and mission: to reach out to all people in order to teach them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God wants all souls to be saved. This goal unifies us because **we** want all souls to be saved, like He does, and it becomes a driving power in our congregations.

So how can we share the Gospel with others? We can daily demonstrate our love to others as Jesus did. Living out the Gospel has a bigger impact on people than just talking about it. We have opportunities each day to show others how Christ's love has transformed us and our lives. Then if people see that our actions match our words, it can inspire them to also answer Jesus's call to love God and their neighbor. This chain reaction unifies us even more as we share Jesus's love with others. (STORY)

In Ephesians 4:1-3, Paul provides a great teaching that connects love and unity: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

From this, we can understand that bearing with one another in love is a means for having unity. Another aspect of this is not to stop loving others because of their faults or failings. Of course, this can be hard to put into practice, especially if another's faults have hurt us personally or ones we love. And yet, we can again look to Jesus as an example. How many people ridiculed Him, mocked Him, played a part in His crucifixion? Were those people exempt from the reward of Christ's sacrifice? No; instead, Jesus asked His Father to forgive them. He died for every sinful, imperfect person – past, present, and future. His sacrificial love covers all people.

While we are not perfect like Jesus, we can strive to love each person around us. We are equipped to do this through the help of the Holy Spirit. Godly love is present when I want the same salvation for my neighbors as I want for myself. Let us, each day, work to follow Jesus's command to love others as He loves us.