**Passing the Baton: From Christ to Church**

Acts 1:6-14

Today is Ascension Sunday. This Sunday is the climax of our celebration of Easter. It prepares us for Pentecost: The Holy Spirit comes to empower the church.

In the Christian faith, the Ascension is the event in Acts 1:9–11 where Jesus was taken up to heaven while His disciples watched. This moment marked the end of Jesus’ time on earth and the beginning of His rule in heaven.

Many classic paintings of the Ascension show Jesus rising into the clouds. These images can make us imagine that heaven is a faraway place like God is “up there,” and not really present down here with us.

In Acts, Jesus had been hanging out with his disciples for 40 days after his resurrection. He talked to them about the Kingdom of God. But the disciples still didn’t fully get it. They asked, “Lord, is now the time you’ll bring the kingdom back to Israel?”

And Jesus says: that’s not for you to know when. But here’s what you do need to know. *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”(Acts 1:8)* Then Jesus ascended.

* Jerusalem - your own community
* Judea – Reaching beyond familiar circles
* Samaria – Crossing boundaries and old divides
* To the ends of the earth – God’s global mission

Why Did Jesus Leave? Scripture tells us this:

* Jesus went to sit at the right hand of God (Eph 1:20, Heb 1:3).
* He fills the whole universe (Eph 4:10).
* He now reigns above all powers and authorities (Col 3:1).

The Ascension means Jesus is no longer limited to one place. He is now with all of us, everywhere, through the Holy Spirit. Jesus may not be physically present with us, but He’s not absent. He is present in a new and powerful way through the Holy Spirit, working in and through the church: in our worship, in our teaching, and in our acts of love and service.

The Ascension isn’t just about Jesus going up; it’s about us stepping up. It’s the moment where Jesus hands the mission to His people and says, “Now it’s your turn.” Jesus has passed his mission on to us. Jesus passed the baton. We’re his witnesses now.

So, the church is a witnessing community, a people shaped by the Holy Spirit’s work and called to live that out.

Sometimes we think of the church as a building or a set of programs. But the church is a people alive in Christ. During the pandemic, we heard a lot about “being church” instead of just “doing church.” To me, being church means going back to the roots of our faith.

From the very beginning, Christians formed small, faithful communities that were visible and active in their neighborhoods.

When we talk about doing things “as a church,” it’s easy to feel overwhelmed. We might say, “We don’t have enough money,” or “We don’t have many young people.” And you know what? That’s true. We don’t have the same resources we once had, and we may not be able to do things the way we used to.

So, going back to the roots of our faith doesn’t mean to go back to the old ways of doing everything. Instead, I’m inviting you to return to the heart of what it means to be the church—right where we are, in our daily lives.

I want to suggest three ways we can live as the church. Here are three ways we can live as the church:

1. **Pray and Listen**

We could let the Spirit show us what the church is meant to be. Being the church isn’t about having all the answers or running all the programs. It’s a journey of listening, of paying attention to where God is already at work and following God’s lead. Let’s slow down and make space to listen to the Holy Spirit. we don’t walk this path alone. If we commit ourselves to prayer, and if we really listen for the Spirit’s voice, I believe God will guide us.

**2. Reflect and Heal**

Over the past few years, we've all been through a lot. The pandemic disrupted our lives that has led economic challenges, political tensions, and the emotional weight of constant change and many of us are feeling overwhelmed. Whether we recognize it or not, these changes have left us anxious and unsettled. It’s easy to react before we reflect. We need space to breathe and to be healed and renewed by God's love and grace.

**3. Live as Christ’s Witnesses**

Let us remember that the church is sent by God to be an agent of change whether we’re gathered in a sanctuary or scattered in our neighborhoods.

We sometimes place too much hope in political leaders or systems to fix what’s broken. But God has already empowered the church, the local congregation, as a witness in the world. We have the Holy Spirit, and that means we can make a real difference.

The local church isn’t just a place we go on Sundays. It’s a community shaped by the story of God through what we do in worship, in prayer, in the sacraments, and in how we live together. The church carries the power of forgiveness, hospitality, and reconciliation. Jesus broke down the walls that divide people, and in His name, we are called to do the same. In Christ, we are made one.

When we gather, we have a chance to reimagine how things like money, power, and belonging work. We practice love across race, gender, and background. We live out these words: “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Bear one another’s burdens. Live in harmony. Don’t be proud or repay evil with evil. Do what is right. Speak with kindness.”

This is how the church becomes a different kind of community: a place of peace, justice, and witness. And the best part? We don’t do it alone. We do it together. As we become the body of Christ through our words, our presence, and our compassion, we become a blessing wherever God sends us. We become part of God’s healing and transformation in the world.

This is what the Ascension reminds us: Christ now reigns, as Paul says, “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion.” (Ephesians 1:21). *“The church is the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”* (Ephesians 1:23)

We may feel small, but we are powerful in Christ. The local church is God’s vessel to bring light into the world through kindness, forgiveness, hospitality, and courage. This is how the church becomes a sign of God’s kingdom.

The Ascension isn’t about Jesus leaving us; it’s about Jesus leading through the Spirit. You are the body of Christ now. You carry his mission. You have his power.