

“Firmly in View” Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:9-11
Ordination/Installation for Tim Priewe July 28, 2019 Prof. Thomas Kock

Luke 24:50-51

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours, from God our Father, and from our Savior, Jesus. Amen. The Word of God for our consideration are the two accounts of Jesus’ ascension, which are recorded both at the end of Luke’s Gospel and the beginning of the book of Acts. We read the Acts reading earlier; here is the same account as it occurs at the very end of Luke’s Gospel.

In the name of Jesus, dear members of Mt. Olive, friends and family, and particularly you, Tim, as you enter pastoral ministry.

Did the disciples have any idea?!? Did they have any idea of what the future held? My guess is that they were pretty clueless. In the Acts reading, we’re told that they had just asked Jesus, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” It seemed as if they were expecting Jesus to now set up an earthly kingdom, and likely expected that they would be enjoying power and glory. Did they have any inkling of what was actually going to happen? It sure seems that they were pretty clueless.

So, do you have any idea? To look at it just generically, do any of us have any idea of what tomorrow brings? Well, not for sure. How about next week, next month, next year? Do we know? No. Oh, we can have some guesses and we can make some plans, but our plans can change dramatically, just like that. Do we really have any idea?

Well, the disciples really had no idea! Church history tells us that they ended up going to different parts of the world, and that most of them ending up dying martyrs deaths for the sake of Jesus. I’m guessing that wasn’t what was in their minds that day on the Mt. of Olives as they asked, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

What awaits you in ministry? Will there be joys? I pray there are many. Will there be sorrows? I’m guessing. Will there be frustrations? I’d imagine. I don’t really know!

Members of Mt. Olive, what will this new pastor be like? In what ways will he help you? How will he challenge you, or encourage you, or perhaps even disappoint you? How long will he serve you? I don’t know! Sounds like we’re in about the same boat as the disciples, huh?

So what does Jesus do with his disciples? He plugs into something which Jesus knows about us humans, that we tend to remember people the way they looked the last time we saw them. Some years ago my wife and I attended our high school class reunion. It was a bit unusual in that it was an all-school reunion, so there were people there from a variety of classes. As we were getting registered, a lady came up to me and said, “Hi Tom!” I looked at her and had, well, no idea who she was. Turns out she’d been a classmate! But, her appearance had changed somewhat dramatically since we graduated, and I’d not seen her during those years. I still remembered her the way she looked the last time I saw her. That’s just the way we’re knit together.

The ascension event is the last time the disciples would see Jesus. This was the sight which would stick in their minds. Do you think it makes some sense that Jesus might have made sure this last sight of Him would be impactful, helpful, encouraging? Oh, I’m guessing so!

And so Jesus takes the disciples up the Mt of Olives, in the direction of Bethany. Was it at the exact place where I was standing when taking these pix? Obviously, we don’t know, but it seems very, very likely that it was close to here. So, what can the disciples all see? Here’s the route which Jesus likely rode when coming into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It was likely in this area that Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples and instituted the Lord’s Supper. Here’s the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus willingly allowed Himself to be taken captive. We walk down the valley and we come to Caiaphas’ house, where Jesus was held captive, put on trial, and where Peter denied Jesus. Somewhere under this church is the likely place for Jesus’ crucifixion, and even more importantly, somewhere under this church is the likely place for Jesus’ resurrection. In other words, in this last sight which Jesus gives the disciples, every critical site for our salvation was in plain view! The disciples could see the Garden, and be reminded that Jesus went to His death willingly. They could see Mt. Calvary, and be reminded that Jesus loved them enough to die for them. They could see the empty tomb, and be reminded that they had a glorious, victorious Savior who had conquered death for them. Do you think those sights might have helped the disciples in the days to come? Oh, I’m guessing!

Do you think those sights could help you, Mt. Olive, and you, Pastor Priewe, as you do ministry together? Oh, for sure! How valuable to be reminded that, no matter what comes, you have a Savior who loved you so much that He was willing to lay down His life for you. What value that gives to you! Jesus was willing to die for *you!*

And of course, how powerfully that impacts the way you look at and interact with each other! For just as Jesus died for you, so Jesus died for that person whom you're talking to, or interacting with, or thinking about, or disagreeing with. Each of you is an eternal soul for whom Jesus was willing to die! How powerfully that impacts you as talk to and think about and interact with each other! You are the eternal children of God, bought at the price of the blood of Christ. See Mt. Calvary! See His love for you!

And oh yeah, you also are on the winning team! Jesus rose! See that empty tomb in your mind's eye, and be reminded that no matter what comes, you win! You win eternally, b/c your Savior won the victory for you! Do you think that might be helpful for you as a pastor, for you as a congregation? For sure! Do you think that might have been helpful for the disciples? Of course!

And if all that wasn't enough, there's more! Let's look at Jesus Himself! After speaking with His disciples, we're told that He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Of course, while His hands are upraised in blessing, what would they have been able to see? The nail marks! The nail marks from the crucifixion, reminding them that Jesus had paid for their sins in full. And as He's blessing them, He starts to go up into the sky. Notice, it doesn't say that He blessed them, then went up into the sky. No. Rather, it says, "*As He was blessing* them." In other words, those hands stayed up, as Jesus continued to bless them.

And notice another detail – it doesn't say that as He went up that He got so small that they couldn't see him anymore. No. Instead, it says that a cloud came and covered Him. In other words, He hadn't really gone away. Rather, the disciples simply couldn't see Him with their physical eyes anymore.

So when the disciples were struggling, when you're struggling, can you imagine how valuable it will be to "see" those hands of Jesus up in blessing? Those hands are up. They have not "gone down," nor will they ever, b/c Jesus rules all things for the good of His Church; you're part of that. See those hands upraised in blessing!

When the disciples had sinned, had failed, and their conscience was bothering them, as yours will bother you on oh-so-many occasions when the devil attacks you and when the devil wins a skirmish, how important to see those nail marks, to be reminded that you're forgiven, in full.

When the disciples were discouraged about ... whatever. When you're discouraged about ... whatever – how valuable it will be to see Jesus rising up into the sky, doing something which no mere human could even think about doing. This is the all-powerful God whom you serve! He can guide you through discouragement, He can bless you through discouragement, He can turn what seems to be discouraging into a wonderful blessing, b/c He's the all-powerful Son of God!

When the disciples were feeling lonely, when you're feeling lonely, alone, for whatever reason, how valuable to see the cloud covering Jesus and to be reminded, "I'm never alone. The Jesus who loves me dearly is always with me. Oh, I can't see Him with my physical eyes, but He's right here, He never left and He never will."

Suddenly two "men" dressed in white were standing next to them. It's two angels. They ask the disciples, "Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" Why are we looking into the sky?!? Are you kidding?!? Did you see what just happened?!? We've never seen anything like that! Of course we're going to be staring up into the sky!

And it wasn't wrong for them to be staring up into the sky, and it's wise for us to glance up there every so often, to be reminded that Jesus will return!

But there's also an implication that now isn't the time to be staring into the sky, for now is the time of grace. Now is the time to tell others about Jesus. Now is the time to grow in our knowledge of Jesus as the Savior, now is our time to take the message of Jesus to others, for the day will come when the clouds will "lift," and there will be Jesus, hands up in blessing, nail marks visible, to welcome His people into their eternal home. For the believer, it will be a glorious day, but for the unbeliever – oh how awful! And so, why just stand there staring up into the sky? There's gospel-work to be done!

Did the disciples have any idea of what was coming? No way. But it was the time to get busy, with this amazing sight of Jesus stuck in their minds. And now it's the time for you to get busy, too. Visit people, members and non-members. Teach the Word well. Preach it clearly. Share Christ with your neighbors, not only with words, but with actions and attitudes. Be an example. And oh yeah ... love your wife!

Carissa, be his support! Stand by him. Be a sounding board. Give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, along with him, embracing the honor of being a pastor's wife. Give yourself wholeheartedly to teaching in the school, that the little lambs may be built and encouraged. And oh yeah, if he needs you to kick him in the backside a bit, well, kick him a bit. It's time to get busy.

And as you do, may this last sight of Jesus stay fixed in your mind, encouraging, motivating, inspiring you, until that great day comes when faith shall be sight, when the clouds lift, and you see your Savior face to face. Until that day, Mt. Olive, know that the ascended Jesus brought this pastor to you. And Pastor Priewe, know that the ascended Jesus raised you up to be a pastor in His Church. With there being so much we don't know, *that* we know. So keep that last sight of Jesus firmly in your view! Amen.