

44 He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

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. 52 Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

It's a Good Thing He's Gone

It's a good thing he's gone. Good riddance. It's about time. Usually when you think of such statements it's because you've found a welcome relief from unwanted company so why would I say such a thing when it comes to Jesus' Ascension? Jesus isn't annoying nor would we describe him as unwanted company, in fact he is loved by us and we would love to see him.

The same was true for the disciples. They too love Jesus. In fact Jesus' departure and the discussion of it left them grieved and greatly saddened during the Maundy Thursday meal. But after the Ascension they were overjoyed and continually praised God in the temple. They too thought, “It's a good thing he's gone.” We too should be glad that Jesus has ascended.

He ascended into heaven. This was all part of the plan. It was all part of the Exodus discussed with Moses and Elijah before Lent began at his transfiguration. This is all part of the plan that was put in place from the very beginning. Jesus told his disciples, *“This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”* Jesus then opened their minds so they could understand.

Jesus pointed back to God's plan. *“This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* Jesus must suffer, rise, and be proclaimed by his people.

But our plans are often different from God's plans. We understand the importance of Good Friday. We understand the necessity of someone stepping into our place, that Jesus suffer and die for the sins of the world. We also understand the importance of Easter and Jesus' resurrection, that for the full assurances that his payment for our sins was accepted. But the Ascension just doesn't seem that important to us. All of us like the disciples would love to have Jesus here with us. Someone to comfort us and tell us everything is going to be okay, heal our sickness, restore sight, take away all of our pain and problems.

How can I say, "It's a good thing he's gone"? Don't we want him here to preach and proclaim and remove all doubt? He's the clincher to convince every doubter with proofs that he is alive, risen from the dead. But what's written in God's plan is Suffer, Rise, and Be proclaimed by his people. That last one of *repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations* is just as important when it comes to the fulfillment of God's promise. The problem is that often we want him to suffer, rise, and serve. Remain with us. Raise us up. Restore us. Be with me.

But our plans are not God's plans, neither are our thoughts his thoughts. God knows what he is doing. We know what Jesus is doing. Jesus is ruling this world for the good of his church.

Can you imagine what it would be like to get a glimpse of Jesus, had he remained? Think about how hard is it to see the rich and the famous? How hard it is to see the President much less spend some time in private with him? How much more so the Christ, the Promised Messiah, the Savior from sin, our Lord and God? Besides if Jesus were still around we'd probably have crucified him again.

But Jesus ascends his throne. *"He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."* The right hand is the highest honor a king could give. Jesus has been authorized to exercise the authority of the king himself. All things are placed under his control, under his feet now. There isn't a thing in this world outside of his control. He is ruling all things for the good of his church over which he is the head.

Yes it's a good thing he's gone because we have Jesus in a much more personal way. Just as Jesus points the disciples he also redirects us back to his Word. Jesus points us back to where he said he would be found. Right here in his Word and Sacrament. He sends the Holy Spirit to work faith through that Word and Sacrament. He promises, *"Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I with them"* (Matthew 18:20). That passage speaks a lot about church discipline issues and how seriously we need to take the

counsel of our brothers and sisters. This passages speaks about repentance and the fact that we've been called to be different, act different, think different, and then believe the promise of forgiveness. God's word tells us how we have failed. The particular failure I'm focusing on tonight is the fact that often we don't want to preach repentance and forgiveness we'd rather Jesus come back down and do it for us. Rather than be Lord and Ruler over all we want him as servant and slave to do our bidding, come back down and treat us as kings. That should scare us because you just don't mouth off and make demands of a king.

And yet that same king, the one sitting at the right hand of the Father is the one who gave his life for us. Jesus intercedes for us on our behalf. Jesus watches over, forgives, and rules all things for the good of his church, for the good of you.

He then motivates us to encourage one another with repentance and forgiveness of sins. He sends us out to the nations so all may know what he has done. It's sad that we can't see him, he hasn't left us alone. When he comes again to judge the living and the dead where he will pronounce, *"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."*

Rejoice! It's a good thing he's gone. It's not because he's an unwelcome guest or unwanted company but he's gone to continue his work for us. Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us and while he prepares that place we prepare people for that place. Jesus may have left us physically but he is still with us in a much more personal way where he has promised to be reminding, restoring, and leading us to rejoice that all is finished and we will join him when he brings us home to him.