

DIRECTIONS – GPS

This is Ascension Sunday, the day we remember Jesus' Ascension into heaven, forty days after Easter. It is one of the five milestones of Jesus' life marked by festivals or celebrations by the church that date back to the fourth century. The other four milestones are His Baptism, Transfiguration, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. We confess the Ascension in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. However, we have for the most part "lost" the church year and the events contained in it except Christmas and Easter.

Are we aware of the various colored paraments that drape from the altar? Today it is white. This color marks a joyful holiday or key points in Christ's life. Churches use this color during the Christmas and Easter seasons too. Next Sunday the paraments will be red celebrating Pentecost and the color red representative the Holy Spirit.

Now the Ascension is noted in the today's reading in Luke, Mark, and Acts. However, from today's reading we can find something we all seek, each day of our lives – **direction- or God's *Personal Solution* for each of us!** **If we pick up a Bible and read what's in it, there are directions and with the help of the Holy Spirit those directions will become clear to us!**

The Bible and its words have been the foundational directions for our country's documents, the legal system, and behavior toward to each other, education, charitable practices, and so much more. This is history, factual. People attacking religion for its focus on hot-button issues point to the Church's lack of focus on charity work, yet facts demonstrate time and again the generosity of religious-affiliated groups and the church. The reason I have mentioned this is the number of articles I have recently read about why people, especially the young, are leaving or becoming "nones" or un-affiliated. **We have not been faithful to the message Christ left with us! We have been silent and let others "paint" us in an unfavorable light.**

This is one of the reasons it is important to remember, understand, and celebrate the church year and the significant events in the life and Jesus and the church, not to draw any attention to us, but to point people in **the direction** of Jesus Christ and God, the Father whose love, grace and forgiveness are unmatched.

It does not come right out and say it in these verses, but we come to understand that Jesus showed forgiveness to each and every disciple! They had all turned and hid at the time of His arrest. Here He was now entrusting His plan for the church to these same disciples. They were witnesses- had seen and heard it all, but completely and unconditionally forgiven. Why, because

of the love of God, which extends to us all!!! No matter how unworthy you think you are, to God you are key to His plan!!!! **Never, never doubt that God has a purpose for you**, and that plan is unlike any other individual on this earth.

When looking at the **Ascension** we can discover directions in Jesus' own words. Not just lofty phrases, long theological terms or just irrelevant facts. **We can find true direction for our lives and the way we ought to live in order to be blessed with peace and joy that nothing in this world can take away.** Picture His disciples witnessing His Ascension. The last verse in our Gospel reading says *"they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem overwhelmed with joy, more joy than winning a sports game or even the lottery. Then the verse goes on "and were continuously in the temple praising God"*

Can we even imagine that kind of joy the disciples had, when we seem "inconvenienced" when we have to attend church once a week for an hour? My desire is to go in that direction where I can find such joy, instead of the day to day "just surviving" attitude. Proverbs 17:22 *"a joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones"*. **God knows us; He created us and knows each of us by name! He is not going to give us bad directions.**

The Ascension is also important to remember and celebrate for what Jesus gave the disciples that day, and even more important is that Jesus still gives that ability to us all. Look at Verse 45 *"then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures"*. **We have the Holy Spirit within, a promise, a gift from God, the father to give us direction.** What is really encouraging about that is, the Holy Spirit will speak to our spirit about the word and what that means for us right here, right now – **God's personal solution, our GPS to guide and direct us!** Of course like any GPS you have to listen for the directions and just like a GPS you can ignore it and keep right on going in the same direction. It is our choice.

Jesus on **this Ascension Day** directs the disciples to go and wait. Think about it, Jesus has just opened their minds to the scriptures and understanding all that has happened according to the prophecies of the Old Testament. I can almost picture the disciples ready to turn and go, but Jesus says "no" you have to wait.

When I give tours at Terrace Hill frequently with the school groups I am giving an explanation of what they are going to see next, but a few are peeling off already. **Jesus gives precise direction to wait and we too have been given the heavenly power, the Holy Spirit. God never sends us out without preparation.** Now sometimes we feel we are not prepared, but if we are listening for God's direction we will know when it is time to go!!! Okay, question, "how do you listen?" It seems "everybody" already knows "how"! You want to know something? Many of us who think

we “got it down”, don’t!!! **God comes to us in many different ways at different times.** When you hear someone claim they have this “pipeline” to God, question that.

Listening to know direction in your life, starts with that relationship we have with Him.

There are no shortcuts, no cliff notes; it takes time and work to establish the relationship and work to keep it alive and going.

There is a group made up of various practices called the Spiritual Disciplines that Wesley gathered from a study of the early Church Fathers and his experiences with the Moravians to arrive at the means of grace in the Methodist faith – *reading, meditating and studying the scriptures, prayer, fasting, regularly attending worship, healthy living, and sharing our faith with others.* – together we would regularly share in the sacraments, Christian conferencing (accountability to one another), and Bible study. Individual practices of mercy- doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others the purpose is to bring us in relationship with God and Jesus Christ, and to keep it alive and meaningful in order that we may find and have direction in our lives, fulfilling the ministry that God desires for us.

Now realize that we can always go in another direction, explore or even stray and that is our choice. However, I will state whether young, such as the youth setting out in new directions just graduating, or older people who have traveled in many directions, **you will never be fulfilled here inside until you live in the purpose God intended for you!!! There will always be something missing, a hunger in your life until you discover that which you were created for!!!** *So nurture that relationship with Jesus Christ no matter what you do in life, because when you do, all the promises of God for your life are yours and indeed your joy in your spirit will be complete!!!*

Another part of our spiritual equation is found in Romans 15:13 “*may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*”

This Verse tells us the importance of joy and peace in believing – faith - that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may abound in hope, doesn’t that sound familiar? Look at Hebrews 11:1 “*now faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen*”

Having faith is the key to joy and peace so we can move in a direction having a hope in things yet to be seen in our life.

This is why we must remember the Birth, the Resurrection, Death and Ascension of Jesus Christ. As a disciple it is these very events and truths that guide our lives through the ups and downs, the mountain tops and the valleys. We are not here on this earth to roam randomly without direction. **Jesus had a purpose for his time on earth and so do we.**

The Ascension marked the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and its successful completion. All had been accomplished according to scriptures. **The Ascension also marked the beginning of his work as our advocate to the Father.** In the first chapter of the Acts in another description of the Ascension the angels spoke to the disciples telling them that Jesus will return *"in the same way as you have watched him go into the heavens"*.

It is just as important to us as current day disciples of Jesus to remember His Ascension. Just as the first disciples walked and talked with him we must have that relationship with Jesus. Many of us here have been witness to the power of healing in his name and answered prayer.

On Thursday there was an article about the girl who fell off the hood of the car and suffered a brain injury. The parents were ready to plan a funeral as her brain had slipped down into her spinal canal, but a man, a chiropractor felt led to go to her and pray over her. Later in the day the doctors took her off life support to ready her to die after being declared brain dead. Well, God had other plans – she struggled for breath, waking from the coma. Jeff Stickel, the one who was led to pray over her gave all the glory to God, as did Taylor's father and mother. A man followed directions from God for his life. **You never know when God wants you to answer the call, but we must we open and willing to say "here I am Lord"**.

In closing most everyone knows of the newspaper comic strip called "Family Circus". One comic strip started out with the mother giving the oldest boy, who appears to be about 6, something to take to the neighbor next door. Then the next frame is from a bird's-eye view, and there is a dotted line showing the route the boy took to get next door. The line takes him across the street, through a park, stops at a swing set and slide, moves on to a brick wall that he apparently scaled and walked like a tightrope, around several other houses, stopping to talk to little boys and girls in the neighborhood, and finally stops at the front door of the next door neighbor's house with the item he was to deliver.

I think that sometimes our days are much like that, except that at the end we haven't delivered anything of value at all. I wonder how fruitful and prosperous, both for ourselves and the kingdom of God, our lives would be if we prayed for the Father's direction for the coming day?" **God will not leave us without direction. Each of us will have a GPS – God's personal solution for our life, if we choose to follow it**

Amen.