

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

16th May 2021 – Ascension Day

ACTS 1:1-11

GET IT? GOT IT. GO!

‘They just don’t get it!’ Have you had that thought, either quietly in your head or speaking it out loud, in relation to a frustration someone is causing you? I used to work with someone who would regularly finish any vent of frustration they had about anyone by saying; ‘He just doesn’t get it!’ or, ‘She just doesn’t get it!’ or, ‘They just don’t get it!’. I would always just sympathetically nod in response and make conciliatory noises of ‘Mmmm, mmmm’, in response, while at the same time thinking in my head, ‘I don’t get it either, but if I say anything I’ll join the list of people who don’t get it!’

They just don’t get it. That is certainly something we could’ve said about the disciples at the time of Jesus’ Ascension. Ascension Day is a celebration which actually fell last Thursday, but we always celebrate it on the following Sunday. And that’s because we have no public holiday for the Ascension, no special service that night. There are no presents, no well known and loved songs. No family traditions or rituals like we have around the Easter and Christmas celebrations. It is the forgotten festival, and yet, as an event in Jesus’ life and ministry, Jesus’ going back into heaven, to rule at the Father’s side, is an event every bit as important and significant as His birth, death, and resurrection. Perhaps we, like the disciples, just don’t get it.

Ascension Day happens 40 days after Jesus rises on Easter Sunday; no doubt about its timing, Luke makes it plain here in Acts 1. So, for 40 days after Jesus comes alive again He spends time with His disciples and others, showing them He is truly alive, and getting them ready for when He will leave them and the Holy Spirit will come. 40 days of preparation won’t surprise us; it corresponds with the 40 days of Lent before Jesus’ death. In the Bible of course we have Jesus’ 40 days in the desert at the beginning of His ministry; Moses 40 days on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments; 40 days of rain on Noah and the ark; and the Israelites spent

40 years in the wilderness before they were allowed to enter the promised land. 40 seems to be God's nice round number to prepare people for something new to happen in His relationship with them.

Now, at the end of this preparation time of 40 days, Jesus gives the final instructions to His disciples, telling them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, which He has been promising.

The disciples though, show that they ... just didn't get it. While Jesus has spent the last three or so years talking to them about God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, they are still thinking in very earthly ways, and also focusing on what they want to happen. So, their response to Jesus' instructions is to say: "Lord, are you now going to give Israel its own king again?" (v. 6) I can just imagine Jesus taking a deep breath and saying to Himself, 'they just don't get it!'

Then Jesus is taken up to heaven. We can only imagine the disciples standing there watching, a bit dumbfounded, feeling abandoned. Then two angels come and tell them to stop looking up, but to remember that Jesus will come back again. It's similar to the rebuke some of these disciples also got from two angels 40 days before, when Jesus rose again and they were told to stop looking in the empty tomb because what Jesus had promised had now happened.

The disciples didn't get it at this time, they remained confused, and they focused on how they thought things should turn out instead of trusting the promises of Jesus. But in just ten days' time, when the Holy Spirit came to them at Pentecost, they got it. They received the faith and understanding that could only come as a gift of God, through the Holy Spirit, and that changed them. Having got it, they could go, following the final command of Jesus to go out and tell all people about Him. And because they, and many others, 'got it' because of the faith God gave them, here we are today gathering together to worship, to be fed and also to be led, lifted up, strengthened and sent out in our faith.

Jesus' Ascension marked the end of His ministry on earth, and His going back in glory having accomplished all that He had been sent to do. But it wasn't really the end of anything,

rather the beginning of a new beginning; the time when the Holy Spirit would come to be with us and the ministry would now be taken up by Jesus' followers, us. The Ascension reminds us of Jesus' power and victory. And the command Jesus gave as He left the disciples reminds us that He began the work, now He has left us, the Church, to complete it.

While that might sound daunting, we do it all the time. A part of how we do this is using what we call the 'Means of Grace', the ways the Holy Spirit comes to us; Baptism, Holy Communion, and God's Word, the Bible. Again, today in our worship service we saw a young child baptised into God's family, knowing that in that simple act the Holy Spirit is at work as another person is welcomed into God's family. Faith is planted in the heart of the one who is baptised, and can now grow. Go!

Also today we have three young people being welcomed to receive Holy Communion with us for the first time. Through this meal, Jesus coming to us in a very real way, His body and blood with the bread and the wine, the Holy Spirit also comes reminding us of Jesus' death for us, of His forgiveness, and of His presence and power in whatever we go through. The Holy Spirit working in Holy Communion helps us to be able to say, 'Got it', and then to be able to take up Jesus' command to 'Go!'.

The Bible; every time we read it, hear it, think about it, hear or read it explained, share its message with others or have it shared with us, live out what it teaches us or seek the love and forgiveness it offers, every time God's Word in any way is in our lives the Holy Spirit is also working to help us to also be able to say, 'Got it'. And then, being led to that belief and understanding, again, we can Go! We go by supporting the work of God's Church in any way, helping this message to be spread. We go by living out our faith; forgiving as we are forgiven, loving as we are loved, caring as we are cared for, making our lives living witnesses which help others to know Jesus and all He wants to give us. We go by serving God and others in the many and various ways He calls us to do this.

At times we will get it easily, and go with confidence. At other times we will be up and down with this, that's why the Holy Spirit remains with us and we need to continue remember our baptism, receive Holy Communion, stay close to God's Word both with other Christians and alone. With God's help, we will also be able to say, 'Got it', and go out to share His message with others as He instructs us to do. Even when we don't really get it, and we will have those times, because it relies on Him, not us, this ministry can still be done.

In a big way the Ascension of Jesus is the crowning glory of His work among us; not the end of it, but the beginning of a new phase. Initially the disciples struggled to get what it was all about, but when they did, with God's help, they went out to share it with others. We too, through what Jesus has done for us, through the Holy Spirit working in our lives, can now 'get' the message of love, forgiveness, hope and peace God gives us, and go out to help others get it also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

Raised Up In Glory

After completing His work here on earth, Jesus was raised up in glory to sit at the Father's right-hand side.

- Consider what it means for us that Jesus is exalted in this way. What benefits does His now ruling in power now bring to us as His people?
- Jesus also intercedes with God on our behalf; He is our advocate. What does it mean for us to have such a powerful and compassionate advocate to speak on our behalf?

For Thine Is the Kingdom

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus always spoke about God's Kingdom as being where God reigns, being a part of His family, living with God. But still, at the time of His Ascension, the disciples didn't really get what it was about.

- Do we always listen to what God is saying to us, or do we filter what He says through the filter of what we want to hear? Ask God to help us to be open minded to the message He is giving us.
- What does it mean for you to live in God's kingdom?
- How do you believe that God has gifted you to work in His kingdom? What roles has He given you?
- Offer a prayer of praise and thanks to God because you can be certain that, through Jesus, you are a part of God's kingdom.

*Pastor Andrew Koehler
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