

“Rightful Place” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Ascension Day, May 13, 2021

- I. **Acts 1:1-11** – previously read
- II. **Space travel really captures the imagination.**
 - a. On May 25, 1961, almost exactly 60 years ago, John F. Kennedy delivered a speech to Congress.
 - i. In part, he said, “*I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth.*”
 - b. Without a doubt, it captured the imagination and the minds of our nation, and we accomplished it on July 20, 1969... in spite of JFK’s assassination 6 years earlier.
 - c. I will always remember that event from my mother’s womb, because I wouldn’t come into the world until October of that year.
 - i. But as I mentioned in a sermon a few weeks ago, space exploration was a big part of our culture in America and, thus, my early childhood
 - ii. In fact, I wanted to be an astronomer for a long time, until I understood it meant a lot of math 😊
 - d. Today, we are beginning to have another revival in manned space travel as Space X is in the news regularly as a private company that will offer the public a chance to become astronauts.
 - i. The very first seats to take this civilian trip to the moon and back (although no moon landing) will be in 2023 – and all the seats were purchased by a Japanese billionaire.
 - ii. He asked for applications from all over the world, and he would give 8 seats to the people who applied and met his requirements.
 - iii. Well I haven’t told any of you this yet, but I just couldn’t let the opportunity go by without at least giving it a try – so I applied for a seat.
 1. The chances of me actually going to the moon and back are probably worse than winning the lotto – but I can dream.
 2. As you can see, they sent me a picture with my ticket.
 - a. I suppose a man can dream, right?
 - e. For all the wonders and blessings of technology and space travel... even if we go to mars and live there one day... life cannot be sustained in such a harsh environment
 - f. We are bound to Earth... at least for now.
- III. **Today is a strange celebration as we mark the day Jesus left the world.**
 - a. Forty days after Jesus rose from the dead, He rose in a different way to take His rightful place by His Father’s side.

- b. Rather than just a few days, Jesus is alive and present bodily (albeit a glorified body), to give the disciples and those who saw Him something to testify to.
 - i. He opened their minds to the Scriptures
 - ii. He breathed the Holy Spirit upon them and gave them the Office of the Keys – or the Church’s power to withhold or grant forgiveness
 - iii. He restored Peter and validated all that the Scriptures foretold, along with His own words of promise.
 - iv. He even did a few miracles.
- c. Finally, as we read in the last chapter of Luke and the beginning of Acts, Jesus is lifted up to heaven.
- d. In a final, stunning miracle, Jesus lifts off... A man with a body like us rose up into the sky and disappeared.
 - i. No longer bound by the world, and not exploring space – but completing His part of the great rescue mission by being crowned King of kings in heavenly glory.

IV. **We often wonder what was in the minds of those disciples.**

- a. Was joy mixed with sadness? Awe and wonder? Confused and disoriented?
- b. It says in the final words of the Gospel of Luke that they went away with great joy after worshiping Him – but I can’t help but wonder how that felt to watch Jesus depart – at least in bodily form, He was gone.
- c. Though we have never had the blessing of being with Jesus like those disciples and what it means to miss out on personal time with Him, we can sometimes feel distant from our God.
- d. Even though God is with us from our baptismal grace to our dying breath... we can feel distant and lonely.
 - i. In the hard times, some people ask, “where is Jesus?” or you’ve heard it said by someone without faith who observes a bad thing that’s happened, “where is your Jesus now?”
- e. Is Jesus off on some far away journey as He leaves us behind in a world that offers so much trial and misery?
- f. I’ve said this many times before, but God chooses to work in ways we don’t always understand...
 - i. When we see weakness – He uses it as strength
 - ii. When we use human knowledge or wisdom – He uses Godly knowledge and wisdom that makes no sense to us
 - iii. When we see death – He exchanges it for life
 - iv. When we see regular bread and wine, or water... He sees a way to deliver the gift of grace
 - v. When we read boring words on a page – He offers a personal connection that engages us, changes us, and keeps us in the faith

- vi. When we see a man tortured and nailed to a cross in weakness – He sees the sins of the world being laid upon our Savior to bring glory and victory and salvation to all of us.
- vii. When we see Jesus depart to take His rightful place as a void – He sees it as the way to raise up His Son to complete the mission and offer the Holy Spirit, who will live in all believers.
- g. Our Savior has not abandoned us by blasting off to some far off mission in space, but instead is closer than ever...
 - i. He resides in us by the Holy Spirit
 - ii. He guides and grows us by His Word – and the offering of forgiveness by pastors (in the flesh)
 - iii. He strengthens our faith by the Sacrament of the Altar
 - iv. And His body on Earth, the Church, keeps us from being lonely – as we have Jesus in us to share with each other.

V. **We now have a “rightful place,” as difficult as it is to understand...**

- a. Without deserving it, God still chose us to receive the gift of forgiveness, life and salvation – which means we are God’s children now... and in our future glory as well.
- b. So as we consider the Ascension of Jesus this evening, and wondering how that fits into God’s plan for us – I bring you back to the disciples who saw their Savior ascend out of sight.
 - i. God sent messengers... angels to remind them to wipe those goofy looks off their faces (that’s my translation by the way) and always remember that Jesus is returning in the same way.
 - ii. Before He returns, we are the witnesses and the ones to carry the salvation story to a lost and dying world.
- c. Just like if one day I happen to get on that SpaceX rocket and blast off – I would not expect you to stand here dumbfounded looking at the sky until I got back 8 days later... You have a life for Jesus to live!
 - i. Certainly you would hope for my return (maybe 😊) but in the meantime there is work to do.
- d. I end with the words of St. Paul in the first chapter of His letter to the church in Ephesus, May the “Father of glory... give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of [Jesus Christ], having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints,” (Ephesians 1:17-18).
- e. By the work of Jesus Christ, you have a rightful place – in the presence of God forever. Amen.