

BECAUSE HE LIVES: I AM SENT

Luke 24:44–53, Acts 1:1–11 | Ascension Sunday & Graduate Recognition

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts. We'll be reading chapter 1, verses 1 through 11.

“In my former book, Theophilus...”

(And just to be clear, he's referring to Luke's gospel here—these are a matched set, volume one and volume two.)

“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave them many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’

He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:1–11).

May God bless the reading and the hearing of these words today.

Well, it's graduation season—that time of year when parents start crying over rented robes and schools try to squeeze 800 names into 70 minutes. And people clap the loudest, usually for that kid who barely made it across the stage.

It's also the time of year when we realize that for all that pomp and circumstance, most of us are stepping into things we don't feel quite ready for. And that's what brings us to the book of Acts, to this strange and sacred transition point. These are the final moments as Luke's gospel gives way to its sequel here in Acts. If there were ever a graduation moment in Scripture, this would be it.

Because Jesus has risen. He has shown up in locked rooms and along dusty roads. He has broiled fish and broken bread and spoken peace into all of their fear. And by the end of Luke's gospel—chapter 24—the tone begins to shift. It's more than just a reunion or a few high fives and, “Look, we all made it.” No, it becomes something else: a commencement.

Jesus gathers his disciples again. He reminds them of everything he's been teaching them. He opens their minds—like that final exam review session. Scripture. Mission. Forgiveness. Witness. He blesses them, and then he ascends. Just like that.

Drops the mic. Takes a skywalk. No closing song. No mortarboard.

Just... blessing. And gone.

And the disciples, Luke tells us, are left staring up into the sky, wondering if they just saw their rabbi turn into a rocket.

And Acts 1 continues from that place—now with a little bit of humor in Luke's tone. Two heavenly messengers appear, two angels, and they basically say: “Why are you still looking in the sky?” This is not the end. This is the beginning.

It's a moment of commissioning. Because Jesus is not leaving them with a title. He's not handing out a diploma. He's leaving them with a mission.

You are witnesses. You are sent.

And it's not always about going somewhere. Sometimes that mission—sometimes that being sent—is about becoming someone. That same Spirit that filled Jesus will soon fill their lives. The same gospel that he lived out will now live through them.

And so, graduates, that's why I love celebrating you so close to Ascension Day—and we'll just call it Ascension Sunday—because this moment that you're in is not about arrival. It's about a launch.

Jesus ascends, but it's not an escape. He is ascending now to power—and to empower. To send. So that his witness, and his life, now becomes multiplied. And at the resurrection, it becomes shared—shared among all of us who would receive it. And through all of us, everywhere, that life can be lived out.

And if that sounds like a lot, or a big responsibility—good. Because it is.

And if it feels like too much—**even better.**

Because you're in good company at that point. That's exactly where the disciples were: full of awe, a little afraid, and probably wondering, "Are we really, really ready for this?"

And spoiler alert—read the rest of the New Testament—no, they are not ready for everything that comes their way. But they are sent anyway. And so are you.

So I want to give you five thoughts. Five things you can hang on to on this commencement day.

AND THOUGHT NUMBER ONE IS THIS: YOU WILL NEVER FEEL READY. GO ANYWAY.

There's a myth we pass down to each other—a precious story, almost like your great-grandmother's Bible sitting unopened on the coffee table. Nobody reads it, nobody touches it, but we still carry it around. And the myth goes something like this: *One day you'll feel ready. One day it will all make sense.*

But that's not how it works.

Jesus doesn't wait for the disciples to finish their spiritual formation checklists and worksheets. He doesn't hand them matching uniforms or hats or t-shirts. He doesn't give them a rubric to make sure they're doing everything right. He opens their minds. He blesses them. And then he departs.

And the disciples are left looking at each other like, "When do we get to panic? He didn't tell us when we get to panic."

Graduates, you don't need to feel fully prepared. You just need to stay grounded—right where you are. Be present. The first move is simply to show up and ask better questions than your readiness to give answers. Keep walking. Even if your shoes don't feel like they're tied quite right.

And this is a message for all of us in church, too. If you're waiting to feel holy enough or healed enough or organized enough to be useful, please know that God is already using people like you—with inboxes as messy as yours. Remember that.

AND ALONGSIDE THAT, REMEMBER THOUGHT NUMBER TWO: DON'T CONFUSE THE SKY WITH THE MISSION.

Jesus goes up, and the disciples look up. And then two angels show up—sort of like stage managers at the end of the concert—saying, "Folks, show's over. Move along. We've got a world to witness to."

And we do this, too. We spiritualize our procrastination. We wait for the perfect divine sign. We wait for the God-delivered job description. We wait for our vision board to be laminated and blessed before we make any move at all.

Meanwhile, the calling God is placing on your life is probably texting you from the next room. Asking something much more ordinary like: “Hey... have you eaten today?” “Wanna get together?”

So I want to name that temptation—because looking for your purpose in the clouds is a lot easier than finding it in the face and the life of your neighbors. But as you lower your gaze and look around—right where you are—you might realize something.

We sometimes keep looking up because we’re afraid to look around. Because when we do, we see the people we tend to avoid. We see the needs we hope someone else will meet. We see the stuff we don’t want to get emotionally tangled up in.

But stop waiting for the heavens to split open. Start being kind—right where you are—as you make your way in the world. Start with the barista who gets your order wrong. The person who cuts you off in traffic. Start there.

And move forward in kindness.

Embody, in your daily life and relationships—those right around you and those you meet—what it is Jesus has shown you.

POINT NUMBER THREE: THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL NOT RSVP.

Not in advance.

The disciples didn’t get a calendar invite from the Spirit. Peter never got a message that said: “Hey Peter, I’ll be showing up next Saturday around 2:45 p.m.—hope you’re emotionally and spiritually available.”

Jesus just says, “Wait.”

Which is fun, right? We love waiting. It’s our favorite. Right up there with small talk at job fairs and group projects where no one responds to the group message you sent.

But, graduates—you’ve learned this. You’ve waited. You’ve waited on college acceptances. You’ve waited on housing assignments. You’ve waited on job offers or internships or apprenticeships. You’ve waited on scholarships that vanished somewhere into that great abyss—right along with your FAFSA password.

But this is what waiting does for us. Waiting creates space. Waiting teaches us to trust.

And when the Spirit comes, when the Spirit moves—it won’t ask if you feel ready. It will ask if you’re ready to act. The Spirit isn’t so interested in whether you’ve got a five-point plan

that's printed and formatted just right and laminated. The Spirit wants to know: *Will you remain available when that plan falls apart?*

Have you built that kind of trust into your life?

WHICH, IN SOME WAYS, SEGUES TO NUMBER FOUR FOR ME: YOUR WITNESS IS GOING TO LOOK A LOT LIKE YOUR WOUNDS SOMETIMES.

We forget that when Jesus ascends to be with the one he calls Father, he ascends *with his scars*. And that tells us everything. The resurrected Jesus has not erased the evidence of his pain. Instead, the resurrection has transfigured it.

And so as you go—you carry so much expectation and joy into the future. But you also carry hurts and regrets and shame and wounds. And as God goes to work in those places, as you receive the healing that God offers, you'll begin to see something astonishing: those parts of your story that you try to hide? They are usually the places where God has been working hardest and longest.

What you will have to say about Jesus will likely come more from the places where you've experienced healing in your hurts than anywhere else.

Your testimony is not a rehearsed script. It's not an elevator pitch. You're not selling pharmaceuticals, for goodness' sake.

No—your witness often begins with just two words: “Me too.”

And then you don't hand someone a theology paper. You send a text to that friend who's unraveling. *That's your witness.*

Because none of us expects you to be shiny and perfect. What people need to know is that you are truthful. And some of the best gospel you will ever share with someone else will come from the stuff you once thought disqualified you.

You can ask Miles Morales.

(Who knows who Miles Morales is? Go ahead, raise your hand. Boomers in the room—just find somebody who raised theirs.)

Miles Morales is the hero, the protagonist of the *Spider-Verse*. And he's a kid who just wants to keep his grades up and work on his sketch pad in peace. Then he gets bitten by a radioactive spider. And now he has to save multiple dimensions, figure out who he is, and try not to disappoint his mom—all while swinging through New York City with imposter syndrome in one ear and the weight of the spider legacy in the other.

And here's the thing: he doesn't win because he's flawless. He wins in the end because he keeps showing up—even when the mask and the uniform don't quite fit.

That is what witness looks like. Show up. Speak—even in the places you’ve tried to hide. Maybe especially in those places.

Because that’s where God is most interested in bringing healing to you—and through you.

AND THE LAST THING I WANT YOU TO THINK ABOUT TODAY—THE LAST THING I HOPE YOU’LL HOLD ON TO—IS THIS: YOU ARE NOT THE MAIN CHARACTER. BUT YOU MATTER DEEPLY.

We live in a world that keeps shouting: *You are the main character!* And then it hands you an anxiety disorder. It hands you an algorithmic identity. It hands you 900 career paths to choose from—and a very specialized, overpriced graduate program to get you to each one.

We have to free ourselves from that.

You’re not the center of the story. But you are in it. You are fully, gloriously necessary.

Because the gospel is never about individual performance. The gospel is a team sport. And the bench is sometimes very messy.

You don’t have to be remarkable in the way the world defines remarkable. The call I want to leave with you is this:

Be faithful. Show up. Be kind. Stay curious. Live like resurrection matters—because it does.

Because he lives, you are sent. Bruised and hilarious and uncertain—sent. And the story goes on!

Here we are. It’s Ascension Sunday. Graduate Sunday. A day of motion and full of change. And we mark this shift from what has been to what is now becoming. And if we’re paying attention, it is a day for all of us—not just those crossing a dais, shaking a hand, and receiving a certificate.

It’s for all of us.

Because in that moment when Jesus ascends, he doesn’t just leave the building. He’s redefining the space we now inhabit. The church is no longer a place people go to find God.

The church is a people who go—because God is already sending. And this sanctuary—for all its beauty, and all its meaning—it is not the finish line. It is, today, where we are. It is the launch pad.

And so to the commissioning.

A BLESSING TO THE GRADUATES:

You may leave this church. You may go to college or to trade school. You may go to military service or to a first job. You may go to a gap year that feels more like a gap chasm.

But you are not leaving the mission. You *are* the mission.

You carry with you the grace you've received here. The formation that has shaped you. A gospel that doesn't stay still.

And you don't have to pretend to know all the answers. You just have to stay close enough to the source that your life starts to look more and more like the truth.

Don't ever underestimate what the Holy Spirit can do through someone who shows up, and tells the truth, and loves like Jesus—even when it gets hard. (*And it will.*)

Remember this: you are not out there alone. You are sent.

AND A COMMISSION TO THE CHURCH:

These were never just the youth group. Or the children's department. Or the young adults. Or the young professionals.

They are our legacy. They are our future.

And if we believe that Jesus is alive—and we do—then the best gift we can give them is a church worth coming home to. A church where witness doesn't mean perfection and polish, but instead a place where wounds are allowed to breathe. Where elders bless and they listen. Where every generation has a place at the table—and a job to do.

You never, ever age out of the Great Commission. And you do not retire from resurrection life. The gospel does not end at the ascension.

It commences.

Amen.

WORKS CITED

The Holy Bible. New International Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.

Lord, Miles. *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*. Directed by Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey, and Rodney Rothman. Produced by Columbia Pictures and Sony Pictures Animation, 2018.

SERMON SUMMARY

Ascension launches us, scarred and Spirit-filled—where is God calling you to show up, even if you don't feel ready?

SERMON MANAGER TAGS

Ascension, Witness, Graduation, Holy Spirit, Mission, Church, Wounds, Commissioning, Resurrection, Community