

[Jesus] said to [his disciples], “These are my words that I spoke to 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 to understand the Scriptures.⁴⁶ He said to them, “This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.⁴⁹ Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”⁵⁰ He led them out as far as the vicinity of Bethany. He lifted up his hands and blessed them.⁵¹ And while he was blessing them, he parted from them and was taken up into heaven.⁵² So they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.⁵³ They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God. Amen.

Right now, on billboards around the Twin Cities, you can see Ideal Credit Union’s latest ad campaign: Live the Ideal Life. Obviously, it is a play on words of a more common expression, usually said rather wistfully: Now this is living the life! Yeah, it might be living the *simple* life – a scaled-down life that is lived by the adage, “less is more.” Or it might be living the *Harley* life – an ad campaign from a number of years ago by Harley-Davidson motorcycles: Harley-Davidson Motorcycles – Live by it. Or it might be living the *athletic* life in one of the best 10 places in the country to do so (topping the list: Boulder, Colorado).

As Christians we talk regularly about living the *joyful* life, living the *righteous* life, anticipating living the *eternal* life. But today, in celebration of living the *Christian* life, on this Festival of the Ascension of Our Lord, you are invited this morning to live the *ascended* life. And as we consider living the ascended life together, please join me in prayer.

Jesus told his disciples the first part of living the ascended life. Listen to what he said in Acts 1 (Luke’s more detailed account of Jesus’ ascension): **You will receive power**

when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.
(Acts 1:8)

A few years ago, the Associated Press carried a story from Glasgow, Kentucky. This is what the article said: “Leslie Puckett, after struggling to start his car, lifted the hood and discovered that someone had stolen the motor.”

Needless to say, Mr. Puckett was not going to get very far in his car. If you have no engine, you have no power. If you have no engine, that makes the car pretty worthless, doesn’t it? As cool as Fred Flintstone looks, that’s no way to drive a car. You have to have power to get somewhere.

Only, the kind of power Jesus is talking about doesn’t come from gasoline, or electric motors. No, the kind of power we need to live the ascended life comes from only one place. It is power that is fueled by the Spirit. It is the power of knowing what our what ascended Lord has done.

Francis Bacon once said, “Knowledge is power.” When it comes to the power of the Spirit, he couldn’t be more correct. The power of the Spirit comes from knowing three things:

First, I need to know that I’m a sinner. Day in, and day out, I sin. Over and over, I sin. God said, “**Be perfect,**” and I’m anything but perfect. Of course, that just makes me feel bad and doesn’t actually give me power. Feeling bad is simply guilt, often accompanied by regret. And so...

Second, I need to know that what Jesus said - **The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day** – has, in fact, happened, just as he said. Now that isn’t just remarkable, its miraculous– a sacrificial act for the eternal salvation of others. But still, in and of itself, as a fact of history, it doesn’t give me power. And so...

Thirdly, I need to know that Christ did all that for me. For me, the sinner. For me, the imperfect man that I am; Christ died for me. I am at peace with God. Heaven is mine. That message of Christ crucified and risen, as Paul puts it, **is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.**
(Romans 1:16)

You see, it is the *for me*, the *for you*, that gives you and me the power of the Spirit, the power Jesus was talking about, the power to live the ascended life, the same life Paul was talking about in his letter to the Colossians: ***Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*** (3:1)

And so, Jesus also said to his disciples: ***You are witnesses of these things.*** It's amazing to look and see that each of us here today has the very same power to do just that; the very same knowledge to do just that; and when we consider what Christ has done for us, and now what he calls on us to do, we have the very same *desire* to do just that: be his witnesses of these things.

But don't think for a moment that witnessing is something you'll eventually get around to doing. You know, if the wind is out of the Northeast, and the barometric pressure is on the rise, and the moon is waning, and the constellation Orion is just visible on the Western horizon, yes, then I'll be sure to witness my faith to someone.

Remember what the angels said to the disciples as they watched Jesus ascend into heaven? They said, ***“Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”***

Living an ascended life means that we live each day in eager anticipation that Jesus is coming soon. You see, our time to live the ascended life of witnessing is limited. So, we need to quit just talking about it. We need to get out there and do it. The world is filled with people who are filled with guilt and scared of death. You can give them the greatest gift in the world—you can give them peace.

So often I hear well-meaning Christians complain that not enough people in this world go to church. “If only more people would go to church...” Have you heard that? Have you thought it? Well, my friends, our text today does not say that

Jesus commanded the whole world to go to church, does it? No, Jesus commanded his church to go to the whole world.

When a man named Luiqi Tarisio died, his home was opened and inside were found 246 exquisite violins. He had been collecting these masterpieces his entire life. All them were stored in his attic, and the best one, a priceless Stradivarius violin, was kept in the bottom drawer of a rickety old dresser. He was so devoted to the violin, that he robbed the world of all that music. In fact, when the greatest piece in his collection, that Stradivarius, was first played, it had had 147 speechless years. No one heard it, because he wouldn't share it.

Look at what we have! We have forgiveness of sins. We have peace with God. We have victory over death! We have eternal life! By God's grace we have the opportunity to live the ascended life each and every day.

So what are we going to do with it? Do we find a rickety old dresser in our heart and leave it there? No, my friends, we boldly live the ascended life! Take out that Stradivarius of the gospel that the Lord has given you and let the world hear its music.

After all, he gives you the power; he gives you the knowledge; he gives you the motivation. And yes, he gives you the opportunity. Because here's the thing about the ascended life, you can live it wherever you go and whatever you do, because the ascended life isn't about where you go and what you do. The ascended life is about the attitude of your heart and your response to all that God has done for you. Even in these days of social distancing and limited contact. In fact, you may have more opportunity to share the hope and confidence than ever before in our lifetimes. So, live the ascended life and be his witness, so that his praises may ring forth from this place...to the very ends of the earth as, like those first disciples, you too ***worship him [this morning] and return to [your ascended life] with great joy...continually...praising and blessing God. Amen.***