

Sermon: Seventh Sunday of Easter (A) May 17, 2026

Peace Lutheran Church, Danville Pr. Lucy Kolin, preacher

Texts: Acts 1:6-14, John 17:1-11

Today is a mix-and-match Sunday...a tad more Easter, a touch of Ascension, and a taste of Pentecost to come. We hear Jesus praying for his disciples just before his arrest in the garden, **and** we hear him forty days after his resurrection commissioning those **same** disciples as his witnesses just before ascending, leaving them with the promise of power when the Holy Spirit descends. These are stories of ups and downs, of comings and goings, of “now you see him, now you don’t,” **and** of the challenge to disciples of **every** age to continue to make Christ visible. Today’s stories appropriately continue the story of Jesus that we follow through the liturgical year, but they are **especially** encouraging to us, the community of Peace Lutheran, in this in-between time, as we remember, rethink, and recommit ourselves to what we believe God is calling us to be as this Christian community before we are ready to call a new settled pastor and write the next chapter in our story.

The Ascension of Jesus has been depicted in various ways by many different artists. Maybe you’ve seen a picture of the painting in which the disciples stand looking up at the feet of Jesus, the only part of him still visible beneath the rising cloud. But this morning I’d like to describe for you a **different** artist’s rendering, a simple woodcut that shows Jesus rising up through the clouds, yes, but that **also** shows Jesus’ footprints on the ground where he was standing just moments before with the disciples. (I tried to find a picture of that woodcut, but wasn’t successful. But you can see a **different** version on the cover of today’s bulletin.) At first, this may seem a little incongruous, maybe even a little goofy. But actually, I think this picture that includes Jesus’ footprints even as he vanishes can help us understand the meaning behind the

question the angels asked the disciples and our **own** role as Christ's witnesses.

Remember how the angels suddenly appear and ask the disciples, "Why are you standing looking up toward heaven?" In the picture I've described, it appears the angels are calling to disciples to look **down** and pay attention to Jesus' footprints visible on earth...not as some sentimental remembrance, but as the reminder of all the ways, all the places Jesus' footprints made an impression, made a difference to people who were hoping yet suffering...as when Jesus was found walking on the wrong side of the street with the wrong sorts of people...or when Jesus walked up to the sycamore tree where Zaccheus, the tax collector, was hiding, and called out, "Zaccheus, come down. Let's walk together to your house for dinner" ... or when Jesus walked, even **stumbled** toward Golgotha with his cross, loving us to the very end.

And do you remember even **further** back when Jesus preached his first sermon at Nazareth and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah? Remember the words he read: "The Spirit has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of God's jubilee"? And then how Jesus said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"? **That** was Jesus saying, "**This** is how I will walk on the earth. Come follow me and do the same."

One of my favorite theological quotes about the Church comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who **himself** kept the message of hope and Good News going in a most difficult time and place, in Nazi Germany. Bonhoeffer, a pastor and a teacher, said **this**: "The Body of Christ takes up space on the earth." That means the Church – and **we are** the Church – is called to make footprints, to make Christ's message of love and mercy visible. But Bonhoeffer went **on** to say, "A truth, a doctrine, or a religion need no space for themselves. They are disembodied

entities; that is all. But the incarnate Christ needs not only ears or hearts, but living people who will follow him.” You and I are called to be Christ’s witnesses...to leave the mark of his love and compassion on everyone we meet and on every situation we enter...so that people will know and trust that **Christ is here**, that Christ is **with** them, and that, **because** he’s here, nothing will be the same again.

Sometimes the angels could ask **you and me** the same question they asked the disciples on the mount of Ascension, “Why are you standing there gazing up toward heaven?” Maybe a **better** translation is, “What are you waiting for? And **who** are you waiting for? **You** are the ones the world is waiting for. You are Christ’s body, the ones called to imprint his footprints here and now.” **You and I**, my friends, are the ones we **and** the world have been waiting for. And the time is **now, not** after you call a new pastor, **not** after things get back to normal – whatever **that** is! --, **not** after we get more members, but **now, right now**.

Next Sunday we will celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the 50th day of Easter, when we rejoice that Jesus fulfilled his promise to send the Holy Spirit. But there’s no need to wait! We **already** have the power to witness and the muscle to create Jesus’ footprints here at Peace, in the neighborhoods and cities around our church, and in the places where you live and work and go to school, and **everywhere** we go.

As always we do not go alone. And even **before** we get there, Jesus and the Spirit are **there**. And today as always we eat and drink Christ’s body and **become** his body for the sake of the world God loves so well. In that knowledge, confidence, and hope, let us close with the words of St. Teresa of Avila, words for such a time as this when the whole world needs to see Jesus’ footprints and know his love abides. You can simply listen to them or you may follow along by looking at the insert. We’ll also be using these words as our Sending today, so keep the insert handy for later.

Christ has no body now but yours.

No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,

Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

The story of the Ascension is not the story of Christ and his goodness vanishing but rather of the impact of his love and mercy **expanding** and filling the world through disciples like you and me. **This** is the time. **This** is our mission. Thanks be to God! Amen.