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Acts 1:6-11

CHRIST ASCENDED TO MAKE
HIS KINGDOM COME

Jesus taught us to pray, *Thy Kingdom come*. So He couldn't refuse the disciples' request when they asked, *Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?* But He did give them an answer they didn't expect. He ascended into heaven right before their eyes. That was His answer to *Thy Kingdom come*. Christ ascended to make His Kingdom come.

It seems, in spite of Jesus' constant training, the disciples still had their sights set on some sort of earthly change –that Jesus was going to set things straight once and for all in world politics. The Jewish people for so many centuries already had been trampled by superpowers like Rome and Alexander the Great. Their land was devastated. Now that His work on earth was finished would Jesus bring together all the nations of

the earth in alliance under Jewish domination and a restoration of the borders and properties of Israel with Jesus Himself as the secretary-general?

But that is not the salvation Jesus came to bring. There was no need for Him to set up any new government because the powers that be have already been ordained by Him. Nor did He come to make this world a better place to live. He came to rescue us out of this world to eternal life. The disciples were concerned about restoring the Kingdom to Israel. Jesus' concern was restoring the Kingdom to God the Father –that gracious rule in our hearts that was lost by Adam and Eve's sin. That is a kingdom we are part of not by might or legislation, peace talks or charitable organizations but through faith in Christ's death.

Therefore Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* explains *Thy Kingdom come* this way: *God's Kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word.* Christ reminded His disciples time and again that He was ascending to God's right hand from where He would pour out the Holy Spirit to make His Kingdom come. In the Upper Room, the night before His death, Jesus told His disciples, *It is for your good that I am going away.*

Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. Had Jesus stayed here on earth in His state of humiliation He would only have been able to reach the small circle people in His area who met Him and heard Him. But from God's right hand He is able to pour out His Holy Spirit on countless people simultaneously throughout the world. So even as He was ascending into heaven He reminded His disciples one last time, *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.*

10 days later came Pentecost, and with it the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who brings people to faith in Jesus and saves them.

In addition, instead of Jesus alone preaching to a limited number of people in a single geographical region, He has designed it that He will reach people through His believers throughout the world. Christ has equipped us with His Word and His Sacraments. Wherever Christ's Word is communicated, whether at your kitchen table, or from a pulpit, or in a classroom, or on a redeye flight to Denver, or in a newsletter, or in a comment to a friend in your driveway –there the Holy Spirit is being poured out by the ascended Christ.

You'll notice that Jesus said to His disciples, *You will be my witnesses*. He didn't say, "You should be my witnesses," like He was shaking His finger at them, "O.K. Now get out there now and start knocking on some doors!" It's not as though Jesus would be sitting there in heaven, wringing His hands helplessly if His disciples weren't immediately working out a community needs analysis. Jesus spoke self-assuredly. He knew they would be His witnesses because He Himself would make it happen. When the disciples all gathered together in a house on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on them and prompted them to tell people the things about Jesus they had seen and heard. The same Spirit backed up their words with power by bringing other people to faith in Jesus and by preserving people in the true faith.

By our very nature, you and I might find it difficult to talk about God and His Word even to our families, much less total strangers. That's the effect of our fallen sinful condition. But for that very reason Christ came. He was fully aware of our innate weakness and let Himself be entirely cursed in our place for it. By His sufferings and death we are pardoned by God.

On the other hand, according to our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit prompts us to be His witnesses sometimes even without our realizing it. Faith in Jesus cannot be hidden. It was the Holy Spirit who prompted you to get out of a warm bed so that you could be here today to state the true faith in word and song to your fellow believers. It's the Holy Spirit who won't let you sit back and not correct it when your child comes home spouting ideas of evolution or unwholesome attitudes. It's the Holy Spirit who prompts you to teach Sunday School or invite a hurting friend with you to Bible class or tell searching parents what a wonderful Christian school we have or write a comforting Bible passage on a card to unchurched acquaintances who have suffered loss. Faith in Christ cannot keep quiet. Christ sees to it.

It's the Holy Spirit that prompts us as a congregation to team up with some 1200 other congregations called the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. We pool our resources together to encourage each other in true doctrine, to extensively train reliable candidates for the ministry, and to send out missionaries to places like Indonesia where we cannot go.

Christ taught us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come." He intends to make His Kingdom come. That is why He

ascended into heaven. From His exalted position He pours out His Spirit on His believers everywhere and uses them to bring salvation to the world and by their ministry to each other, to keep believers in the true faith.