**Coming Home May 29, 2022**

When I was 18 years old, I moved to California to study at Ambassador College for 4 years. My family was in Ontario, about 4,000 km away, and at first it was really hard to be away from home. I missed my family, my friends, all the things that made up “home” for me. After one semester, which was about 4 months, my parents brought me home for Christmas. It was so good to be back! My little sister had made a big welcome poster, my mom cooked my favourite foods, I visited and laughed and played with my family and friends. It was so sweet! Perhaps you can remember a time when you came home and felt the same wonderful, warm feeling of belonging, of being loved, like a contented sigh at the end of a long day.

We are in the 7th week of the Easter season on the Christian calendar. Seven weeks ago we remembered our Savior’s sacrificial death on the cross, and celebrated his victory over sin and death as he was resurrected from the dead. We’ve remembered how he appeared to Mary and the disciples and many others in the 40 days that followed. He told them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, which we will celebrate next Sunday at our Pentecost service.

Today is called “Ascension Sunday”, the day we remember Jesus’ rising into the clouds, going home to his Father in heaven. Let’s go to the scriptures and read about it, picking up the story in Luke 24:45-49

*Then he [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”*

*And he led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.*

Can you imagine this scene? As Jesus is standing with them, pronouncing blessings on them, suddenly he goes up to heaven before their own eyes. What an experience! How affirming, encouraging this must have been in their faith journey.

But have you ever considered the **joy of the everlasting Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit** in this great reunion, this great homecoming?

When my children were young, my parents lived in this area. My kids loved to visit Opa and Oma, and especially to stay overnight. One of their favourite movies to watch together was called “Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey.” It’s the story of 3 pets who were left with friends while their human family went on vacation. The 2 dogs and 1 cat embark on a long and dangerous journey to go home and reunite with their family. Here’s a clip from the end of the movie:

HOMEWARD BOUND: THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

Perhaps I should have passed out some Kleenexes before I showed this clip! I wanted to remind you of **the joy of the reunion**. When Jesus arrived home, there was an amazing celebration in heaven! It was the party of all parties with the heavenly Father, the Son the Holy Spirit and an army of angels singing and celebrating. And there must have been lots of chocolate since chocolate is the food of heaven, at least in my books! There was music. There was dancing. There was laughter and probably not a few tears as Jesus fell into the arms of his father. The Son had arrived home. He was fully reunited with his eternal Father and the Holy Spirit in every way. **His work on earth in a physical body was complete and he was now reunited with his family in heaven.**

Jesus was the first one to take a human body up into the Father’s presence like that. He was the only one who could, because everyone else has been messed up by sin. And guess what--because he did, he opened a place for us too. **He has invited us to come home**. The Father is waiting for us, like the children in the movie clip, and there is great joy and celebration when one of his precious children comes home.

Let’s take another look at the 40 days after Christ’s resurrection and the ascension as Dr. Luke describes it in Acts 1:1-11 (NRSV):

*In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach**until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.**After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*

*While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me;**for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

*So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

*When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” Acts 1:1-11 (NRSV)*

Why didn’t Jesus just disappear? He had appeared to them behind locked doors and then disappeared from their sight before. Why didn’t he do that this time? And why the cloud?

In both the Old and New Testaments, a cloud is the symbol for **God’s presence** and **God’s glory**. We remember God leading Israel out of Egypt with the cloud by day and the fire by night. He filled the tabernacle, and his presence was like a cloud.

In Isaiah 19:1 we are told that God rides on a cloud—it’s his “vehicle.” This is biblical imagery that helps our human minds picture and grasp things that are—on their own—beyond human comprehension.

**The cloud imagery in Acts 1 tells us that Jesus is God.** He is the presence of God, and he is God’s glory. Jesus is homeward bound, rejoining His heavenly Father. But Jesus is also called the Son of Man. Daniel has a vision about this:

*“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.” Daniel 7:13*

So here we have Jesus who is bodily resurrected (remember that he was even eating with the disciples after his resurrection). Now in this physical, resurrected body, he ascends to heaven before their eyes. **In doing so, he opens a place that otherwise would be bodily inaccessible to humans, a place in the life of God for humanity.** His work as God incarnate—God in the flesh—is now complete!

What do I mean by this—that Jesus’ work as God in the flesh is **complete**? Jesus said, “It is finished.” The law and the prophets are completed – fulfilled. The fall is redeemed. The enemy is crushed. Death is destroyed. Salvation has occurred. **The kingdom of God is here now in his body, the church**. Jesus did what he came to do. His incarnate work – the work of God as a man in flesh and blood – was completed.

Jesus ascended to heaven before the disciples’ eyes so they could be eyewitnesses of this amazing event. **The limitations of time and space that Jesus experienced as a human had ended.**

Have you ever thought about life without physical restrictions? Being in a room with people yet not being seen? Walking through walls or locked doors? Flying or travelling at the speed of thought? Perhaps even going back or forward in time? **It’s easy to limit Jesus by assuming he is sitting on a throne somewhere, waiting for the Father to let him return.** But that is to assume Jesus is still limited by a physical body. While we cannot adequately explain a glorified body, we know Jesus is no longer bound by geography, science, or natural laws. He is free from earthly limitations; although he is in heaven, he is always near, he is still doing his work IN and THROUGH us.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit—our helper—is sent down in power and spiritual gifts are imparted. The church is born—the new, spiritual body of Christ.

The apostles were eyewitnesses to the bodily ascension of Jesus. He was no longer in their physical presence but, through the Spirit, he would still be with them. As Jesus assumed his kingship and high priestly role in heaven, his prophetic role would continue through the Spirit in the lives of his disciples, the Church. They were to go into all the world, preach the gospel, seek and save the lost, make disciples and in so doing participate in the **ongoing ministry of Jesus on the earth**.

As the angels told the disciples on that Ascension Day so long ago, at God’s appointed time, Jesus will return bodily in the same way that he left. He will come again in a cloud and every eye will see him. But, **until that day, his ministry continues on the earth through the Spirit in the work of the Church**. There is much work left for us to do.

Therefore, we should not stand around gazing up to heaven wondering “how can I figure out when Jesus is coming again?” We need to do that work that has been prepared for us.

Be assured, Jesus **will** come again, and he will park his cloud on the Mount of Olives and all creation will rejoice. **Until that day, let each of us actively continue to participate in the ongoing ministry of Jesus**. Let us seek and save the lost and make disciples by living and sharing the gospel. Let’s encourage people and tell them about the perfect love the Father has for them, the unconditional love, his welcoming arms that wait for all who bear his image. Let’s point people to their **true home** in the beauty of the love-filled Trinity relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus went to his crucifixion, he encouraged the disciples with these words:

*“Don’t let this rattle you. You trust God, don’t you? Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father’s home. If that weren’t so, would I have told you that I’m on my way to get a room ready for you?* *And if I’m on my way to get your room ready, I’ll come back and get you so you can live where I live.” John 14:1-4 MSG*

Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place for us in his Father’s house. He’s expecting us! He’s blowing up the balloons, preparing the welcome home sign, lining up the angelic choirs, and making lots of chocolate. He CAN’T wait to welcome us home.

While we’re waiting to lay down our physical bodies and go home, we have the helper, the Holy Spirit, preparing us, making a home IN US for Jesus. How beautiful is that! And he sends us out to do the work he’s already prepared for us, telling people about God’s amazing love and the home THEY have waiting for them. A home where they belong. A home where they are celebrated. A home where they are completely loved. A true, forever home in the Father, Son and Spirit.

I am going to close this message with another video by a group called CAIN. The song is called “The Commission,” and it takes us back to Jesus and the disciples after his death and resurrection, just before he went home to heaven. The lyrics are powerful and inspiring. Enjoy!

**The Commission**

Verse 1

See my hands look at my feet  
It’s okay if it’s hard to believe  
I have faith you will do greater things  
It’s my time to go but before I leave

Chorus 1

Go tell the world about me  
I was dead but now I live  
I’ve gotta go now for a little while  
But goodbye is not the (end)

Verse 2

Don’t forget the things that I taught you  
I conquered death and I hold the keys  
Where I go you will go too someday  
There’s much to do here before you leave

Bridge

End of the journey the end of the road  
My spirit is with you wherever you go  
You have a purpose and I have a plan  
I’ll make you this promise  
I’ll come back again but until then

Chorus 2

Go tell the world about me  
I was dead but now I live  
I’ve gotta go now for a little while  
But goodbye is not the end  
(Go tell the world) Go tell them about me  
(Go tell the world) I’ve gotta go  
Go tell the world) For a little while  
But goodbye is not the end

CCLI Song # 7146623 Blake Neesmith | Carter Frodge | Logan Cain | Madison Cain | Taylor Cain © 2019 All Essential Music (Admin. by Essential Music Publishing LLC)

**Sample Prayer:**

Father, thank you for sending Jesus. We‘re so tired of this messed up world, of our human brokenness, and we eagerly wait for the day when you will send him to us again.

Jesus, thank you for coming and for sending us the Spirit.

Spirit, thank you for coming and making Jesus present to us.

Bless us as we continue to be about the Father’s business. You’ve sent us to live and share the gospel, to tell the world the good news about your love, the salvation we have in Jesus, and the **true home for everyone** in YOU.

Jesus, you’ve made the way. You’ve opened heaven. We’re coming home!

In your name we pray,

Amen.

**Benediction**

*Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,**so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**and every tongue should confess  that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (*[*Philippians 2:6-11 NRSV*](about:blank)*)*