



Jesus Commissions the Disciples

God Works through Us

About the Story

After Jesus' resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples, but only for a short time. In Luke and Acts (two books that are written by the same evangelist; think of them as Part 1 and Part 2) Jesus walked to Emmaus with two disciples, become known in the breaking of bread, gave them his peace, ate some fish with them, and opened "their minds to understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:13-49). But then, without much notice or reason, Jesus was lifted up into heaven.

The Point:

Jesus sends us to spread the good news everywhere! Jesus ascends to heaven and entrusts his mission to his disciples. He promises that they will receive power and the Holy Spirit so that God will be working through them in this mission.

What did the ascension mean? What was the point of Jesus' resurrection if he would ascend to heaven a few weeks later? We have come to understand that as long as Jesus the person remained, even Jesus the resurrected person, God's salvation was localized. This is because Jesus was a person bound by time and space. By ascending, the Holy Spirit arrived to all believers and that God's salvation was poured out on all people in all places. God's salvation became global, even cosmic, through the ascension.

However, Jesus is very clear that before that Holy Spirit arrives, the disciples are to remain in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4). The disciples do just that—they were "constantly devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14). There is an interesting insertion of two men who show up and give words of advice to the disciples: "why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" (Acts 1:11a). Almost word for word, this is the same duo that showed up at the empty tomb and asked, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5). In both places, the tone of the writing is incredulous; as if the men think that the disciples and women are all doing exactly the wrong thing at the wrong time. One can almost hear them saying as the disciples watch Jesus' feet disappearing into the clouds: "Don't stand here waiting for all this to reverse itself. You heard what Jesus said: 'You will be my witnesses.' So get going!"

The words of these two unnamed men are a reminder to you and I—God calls us to worship, but also calls us to witness. Our witness, however, is not of our own power; it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit. Worship becomes our window to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. And it is in that empowerment that we are called outward into the world.

Last Week/ Next Week

Last week, three women go to Jesus' tomb and find it empty. They run away in terror when an angel announces Jesus' resurrection. Eventually the word gets out about Jesus' resurrection and his disciples, who had been in hiding, gather around their risen Lord. In today's lesson, Jesus ascends to heaven after commissioning his disciples to share the good news. Next week Peter and John prove to be the witnesses Jesus said they would become in this week's story as they heal a man lame from birth in the name of Jesus.

Opening Prayer

God of hope, the disciples were amazed at Jesus' presence among them after the resurrection and at his ascension into heaven. Let us be amazed at the story, too, hearing it as if for the first time. Let it inspire us to go out into the world and serve all in need, empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit. We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Into the Story

Think of a time you had to let something or someone go in order to move forward in your life. Perhaps it was an idea for your future that turned out to be too limiting. Perhaps it was holding out hope for something that was not meant to be. How were you able to let go and move on? In what ways did letting go help you move forward? Go around the room and share your answers.

Learning the Story

Forty days after his resurrection, Jesus tells his disciples that they will receive the Holy Spirit and go out to the ends of the world to be witnesses. Jesus then ascends into heaven and the disciples return to Jerusalem.

Read Acts 1:1-5 – The Promise of the Holy Spirit

- ❓ Where does Jesus tell his disciples to stay until they receive the Holy Spirit? Why do you think he ordered them not to leave?
- ❓ What do you think the difference is between John's baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Read Acts 1:6-9 – Jesus' Ascension

- ❓ As usual, the disciples want details and ask Jesus "is this the time?" (verse 6). When have you asked God for some specific details?
- ❓ Jesus replied with a statement on trust: you do not need to know those things, but you will receive "power" when the Holy Spirit shows up. How might that power of the Holy Spirit be better than having the details?
- ❓ Read John 16: 4b-7. Why was the ascension necessary according to this passage? (Note: the "Advocate" is another term for the Holy Spirit.)

Read Acts 1:10-14 – The Two Men

- ❓ Read Luke 24:4-5. Do you think these are the same two men? Why or why not?
- ❓ What about their questions: “Why are you looking for the living among the dead?” and “Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” How do you interpret those questions? Do they have a particular tone? Are they expecting a particular answer?
- ❓ Jesus had instructed the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they were “clothed with the power from on high” (Luke 24:49). What did they/do you think they did in the meantime?

Bible Connections

- ✚ In Matthew 28:16-20 Jesus commissions his disciples using words similar to his words in Acts 1:8. They are to go and make disciples of all nations through baptism and teaching.
- ✚ The Gospel of Mark also tells the story of the ascension (Mark 16:19-20).
- ✚ Paul describes how Jesus will return to in order to raise the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Living the Story: Prayer and Closing Prayer

There are many different types of prayers, including intercessions (praying on behalf of others), supplications (a request or petition), praise, and repentance (asking for forgiveness). For the four weeks of this unit, we will use the acronym P.R.A.Y. (Praise/Repent/Ask/Yield or Yes!) to guide our Living the Story activity. You can use this acronym at home to help guide your prayers or to help teach a child in your life! Today, we focus on P – Praise.

Begin this activity by discussion situations in which you have encountered prayers of praise before, such as in worship, scripture, or your daily life. As a group, make a list of things you are thankful for. Consider writing the list down so all can see it. Then, say a prayer that incorporates all that you are thankful for. You can use the following format as a guide, but feel free to come up with your own: Dear God, you have provided us with so much to be thankful for. Among them, we thank you for *[say your list of items here]*. Above all else, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen!

At Home

- ✚ Search the Internet for “ascension art” or similar phrase to find a variety of images. Pick a few that are your favorites. Print them out or set one as the background image for your computer or phone so you can reflect on the image throughout the week.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: What Was the Roman Empire?

The Roman occupation of Judea started in 63 BCE. Most people living in Judea had little input or freedom under Roman rule. The people also had no say in the government. Roman occupation also meant Roman military presence. People who were seen as a threat to Rome were often tortured and crucified. This violence, high taxes, inability to have self-governance even over religious matters, and an increasing pressure to worship Roman deities, led to growing tension between the Jewish people in Judea and the Rome. This tension led to the Jewish-Roman War. This war lasted from 66-73 CE. One result of the war was that the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE.

- ✠ It is still the season of Easter! Think of small ways you can celebrate and share with others the good news of Jesus' resurrection and the promise of eternal life every day!
- ✠ Continue to keep a list of everything you are thankful for each day this week. At the close of each day before bed, say a quick prayer of thanksgiving to God for everything you included on your list.

Daily Readings

Sunday – Read Acts 1:1-14

Jesus commissions the disciples. What is God calling you to do?

Monday – Read Acts 1:15-20

The fate of Judas is detailed. How have you betrayed or denied Jesus? Say a prayer for forgiveness, trusting that God has already forgiven you.

Tuesday – Read Acts 1:21-26

The disciples add Matthias to their group. Invite someone new to your small group for next week.

Wednesday – Read Acts 2:1-13

The Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples gathered in Jerusalem. What images come to mind when you think of the Holy Spirit? Draw a picture, write a poem, or make a collage.

Thursday – Read Acts 2:14-21

Peter addresses the crowd. Read verses 17-21 as a prayer.

Friday – Read Acts 2:37-42

The disciples baptize the first converts. What does baptism mean to you?

Saturday – Read Acts 2:43-47

A description of the early church is shared. How does this church differ from current church communities?