

Dear Friends,

There have been many graduations these past weeks. Young adults will also be out looking for jobs. In the early 1980's, one of my sisters graduated from nursing school in Denver, Co. After she graduated she couldn't get a nursing job, so she went to work in a clothing store in Denver for a while. Later an uncle was able to get her a nursing job in Chicago. She got her start. From everything I'm reading these days, many graduates are having trouble finding jobs. I read this past week in the *Wall Street Journal* that teens will also have trouble finding work this summer. This may have happened to you at one point in your life.

We count on Jesus to help us to find work and a purpose in life. We also count on him to help when we want to fulfill our purpose as Christians. In fact we hear today that **The Ascended Jesus Calls Us to Kingdom Work**. We find out through the author of the book of Acts, who is Dr. Luke, that Jesus has given us purpose, gifts and hope.

1. Jesus established his Kingdom.

Dr. Luke was writing to his friend, Theophilus. He had already written about the life of Jesus in an earlier book. We know it as the Gospel of St. Luke. In both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts the doctor is writing to witness that Jesus had established his Kingdom.

1. Theophilus was probably not a Christian when Luke wrote his first book. Now in the beginning of the book of Acts, Luke reminds him that he had written about Jesus' life and the things he did and said. This would cover from the announcement of Jesus' conception to his Ascension into heaven. Now Theophilus was familiar with the events and there are indications, that by the time of the writing of Acts, he was a Christian.

2. Luke does not restate Jesus' whole ministry in Acts 1, but he highlights one key fact. After Jesus suffered, he gave many convincing proofs that he had risen from the dead. He did this over period of 40 days to make sure they understood that it was him and that he was alive.

Then Luke reminds Theophilus that we don't see Jesus because he ascended into heaven. He finished his work of establishing his kingdom. He had suffered and died for the sins of the world. Through his body and blood

people had forgiveness of sins and peace with God. Through faith in him people would become a part of God's kingdom.

C. Most of you would be familiar with Costco and Sam's Club. These are stores where you have to have a membership to get in or at least to buy merchandise. Certain golf clubs, like Augusta National Golf Club where the Masters, PGA tournament, is played, are very exclusive, where without a membership, you can't get in.

Being in God's kingdom is even more exclusive. God does not allow sinners on the premises. The Bible makes it clear when St. Paul says in Ephesians 2, **"you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God."** (12) That includes you and me. In the parable of the wedding banquet Jesus tells us that the king spotted a man at the banquet without wedding clothes. He was immediately thrown out on the king's orders. (Matt 24) The message is clear even if a sinner got into heaven, they could not remain. How do Theophilus and you and I get into heaven?

Jesus gave us access heaven. Remember in the Gospel of Luke Jesus told the thief on the cross next to him, **"Today you will be with me in paradise."** Jesus was on the cross between the two thieves so he could offer his life for sins. Now sinners like you and I can enter heaven. In Ephesians 2 St. Paul put it this way, **"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."** (13)

Luke reminds Theophilus of what Jesus said and did, so he will never forget his Savior. So we need to listen to the Scripture witness so we never forget Jesus and our salvation.

2. Jesus is building his Kingdom.

Our Lord established his kingdom, but he is still building his kingdom by adding people. He wants to use us, his disciples.

A. He makes a promise to us. He will send the Holy Spirit to help.

1. He told his original disciples, **"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.** We heard last Sunday that while he was at the Last Supper he promised the Holy Spirit as Counselor.

Today we lay on hands at the Rite of Confirmation. It is not that the Holy Spirit hasn't helped before. However, we pray for an extra measure of the Spirit as a person is now going to follow Jesus as an adult Christian.

Likewise, Jesus' disciples had the Holy Spirit before Pentecost, but they received an extra measure of his gifts as they entered the public ministry. We still lay hands on our called workers as they enter service in the public ministry. We want the Holy Spirit to help them in this new phase in their life.

2. Jesus distinguishes this out pouring of the Holy Spirit from our Baptism. When John, the Baptist baptized people he used water and they came to faith or had their faith strengthened. The Holy Spirit was also there giving faith. When Jesus says the Spirit is outpoured, he is not bringing saving faith which a disciple already has. St. Paul lists some gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12. He talks about "**wisdom**" and "**knowledge**". That is the ability to know God's word and to put into practice. He mentions "**faith**" which is not saving faith, but confidence and boldness as we serve the Lord. I won't list anymore gifts, but I invite you to look at 1 Corinthians 12. All the gifts are meant to help us build God's kingdom.

B. Jesus tells us to help build his kingdom when he says, "**You will be my witnesses.**"

1. At this point the disciples are wondering. "Is this an earthly kingdom or only a spiritual kingdom?" I say this because in verse 6 they ask, "**Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?**" There was a belief among the Jews that the Lord was going to return Israel to the glory days of King David when their country was a world power.

Their question is a little surprising given that they knew he had told Pontius Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world. Jesus wanted them to work on building his spiritual kingdom. After the last day, or Judgement Day, it will be a visible kingdom

2. Jesus speaks to the matter indirectly by giving them their marching orders. They are to use his word which will build the kingdom in people's hearts. They are going to begin as his witnesses in their home territory and then they were to go to the ends of the earth.

C. Some years ago a WELS congregation got involved in a business. It was not going well. Some of our leading pastors had to go in and tell the congregation, "*Folks, you are not focused on ministry. Your purpose is to gather around word and sacrament and to reach out and invite others to join you.*"

We need to be so careful that we do the work that Jesus has given us. We reach in with the gospel and we reach out. Everything we do should be

tested with the question, “Will this help us to build Jesus’ Kingdom?” We have the gifts of the Holy Spirit to help us to do the work.

3. Jesus will return for his Kingdom.

It has been a long time since Jesus left. The disciples have been building God’s kingdom for centuries. Will this ever end? We have assurance that this will end. Jesus will return for his kingdom.

A. When Jesus ascends upward, the disciples stand glued to the ground staring up. Two men in white, angels appear and ask, **“Why are standing here looking into the sky?”** The implication is that they should get going because they have work to do. One sign that Jesus is coming back is that he wants us to work while we still can. Jesus put it this way in John 9:4, **“As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”** I don’t believe Jesus is asking us to rush around as contestants often do at the end of a cooking contest. You know the expression, *“Haste makes waste.”* However, as we live our lives he wants us to take opportunities to share the Good News or to help others in doing so.

B. We also have verbal confirmation of Jesus return from the men in white, **“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”** (11b) Jesus promises this in the Gospels. This is the same message that we get from the Book of Daniel (7:13,14) in the Old Testament and the New Testament Book of Revelation (1:7). We have a sure hope. That sure hope sustains our faith and moves us to witness for Jesus.

Conclusion: In Psalm 42 the author complains because he says, **“My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”** (3) We may feel we can identify with him. We serve the Lord to build his kingdom and things don’t always go well and our enemies mock us. Acts, chapter one helps. Jesus isn’t here visibly because his kingdom is established. He has ascended in glory as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. He isn’t here visibly because he has chosen to work through us. The gifts of the Spirit and the Spirit himself testify to this. Others may not understand, but he is calling us to share the good news so that his kingdom grows. We do this for the Ascended Jesus who will return someday. Amen.