

Luke 24:44-53 The Ascension of Jesus, Mother's Day, May 13, 2018
Sermon Title: "Power From on High" The Rev. Dr. Betsey Crimmins

In case you missed it, the Ascension of Jesus was celebrated this past Thursday, May 10. It's always celebrated 40 days after Easter, which means that the Day of Ascension always lands in the middle of the week. However, it is also always celebrated again on the Sunday after the Day of Ascension, which of course is today. And today also happens to be Mother's Day. So what is a preacher supposed to do – stick to scripture on the Ascension? Skip the Ascension all together and go for the scripture for the seventh Sunday after Easter, which also is today? Or focus on Mother's Day? As you can see, today's preaching challenge is ... shall we say, complicated ... and tricky.

But you've gotta start somewhere and so I'm going to start with the Ascension.

In 2013, when the Day of Ascension rolled around, my husband and two out of three daughters and I happened to be in Germany on vacation. The Day of Ascension was the day that we were scheduled to take a train to Cologne where we were going to visit the Cathedral of Cologne. We discovered pretty quickly that the Day of Ascension is a national holiday in Germany. The train was packed. I don't know how many of you have been to the Cologne Cathedral. If you have, you know how magnificent it is. We spent the whole rest of the day exploring it.

Since it was the Day of Ascension, the Cathedral closed at 5 pm for Mass. Visitors had to leave, unless they were going to stay for Mass. We decided to stay for Mass. The Mass was in German. I didn't understand too much of what was said, but I sure got a sense of something powerful happening – something that was bigger than anyone of us. It was beautiful.

I can imagine that was one of many feelings that the disciples experienced as they stood there watching Jesus ascend to heaven. Something bigger and more powerful than any one of them was happening. Something bigger and more powerful than anything that they could ever imagine was happening. They were witnessing the real power from on high, just a few moments after Jesus had promised that they would be "clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:49) No wonder Luke says that after Jesus left them, they worshipped Jesus with great joy. They returned to the temple and praised God.

As we all know, it was only a matter of days before they were clothed with power from on high, as promised. That clothing happened on that dramatic day that we now call Pentecost. In the meantime, they were being obedient to what Jesus had asked them to do. They were sitting tight, worshipping and waiting.

You see, Jesus made it clear that although this Ascension was the end of his earthly ministry, but it wasn't the end of his mission. His Ascension was the

beginning of the disciples' mission. It was the beginning of the church's mission. And the disciples were going to get a power from on high with which to carry on Christ's mission. To me, that would have been pretty exciting.

You know, whenever any of us stand up front here, profess our faith and become members of this congregation, we are publicly proclaiming that we are relying on a power beyond ourselves – that same power from on high that clothed the disciples. Ascension Day then becomes a day to remember that it's the Spirit at work in the church that makes all manner of impossible things possible – perhaps things even more mystifying than Jesus rising into the air. For example, for us as a church the power from on high made it possible for us to pull off a total kitchen renovation in a matter of months – remember, we started in December with the fund raising and we were done by the end of April. The power from on high has made it possible for our church to reach far places around the globe like Japan, Mexico and Scotland, as well as to reach deep into some of the neediest neighborhoods both here in Elmira and elsewhere in our country. The power from on high has made it possible for us to rally around so many families who have faced serious illness, deep grief, or some other big challenge.

The power from on high has also made all sorts impossible things possible for individuals. For example, I think of the number of people who had been addicted to drugs and/or alcohol who are now sober. When asked how they've done it, so many will reply that they didn't do it – it was the power from on high working in and through them that did it. Sometimes it's seems that the dark shadow that is grief over the death of a loved one is so deep and strong that nothing can remove it – but then in sometimes surprising and unexpected ways, slowly God does erase it, using that power from on high.

Today is Mother's Day – with all the pressures upon our kids and upon families, and all the challenges that threaten the wellbeing of kids and families, parenting seems like an impossible job. My guess is that any of you who are parents here have had your moments when you just didn't know if were going to make it as a parent, but somehow you do make it and your kids turn out okay – and you realize that actually you didn't do it all by yourselves – you, too, had that power from on high.

I leave you with a story. It's true story. Several days ago I had a conversation with a woman who is a retired social worker. She and her husband live in a county north of here. Together they have children and grandchildren. They do a lot of volunteering in their retirement, etc.

She started the conversation with me by saying, "I'm going to be a mother again." I didn't know what to say, because I'm looking her and thinking, "Is this God doing the Abraham and Sarah old age birth miracle again?" She quickly went on to explain that on and off over the years she and her husband have been foster parents. One night two years ago, they got a call from the local police. It was an emergency.

The police had just arrested and thrown into jail the parents of a one-year old little boy. It was the 4th drug arrest for the parents. Needless to say, the police needed an immediate placement for the little boy. His parents wouldn't be out of jail for a long time. Without skipping a beat, she said sure and they took the boy in. Well, it's now over two years later. The boy is three, and still with them. She said to me, "My husband and I have fallen in love with this boy. He is cute and smart and a wonderful child. At the end of the month, we go to court to get full custody and to adopt him. Everyone including his birth parents agree on this. He will be our son." But then she went on to say, "My only worry about this is my age. But by the grace of God and the power of Jesus we will be able to raise our son to adulthood."

And isn't that true for all of us as parents, no matter our age – it is the grace of God and the power of Jesus that gets us through the ups and downs of life as parents.

The bottom line is this: we cannot lose sight of the fact that Jesus, through the power from on high, is still engaged in our world and in our lives. Perhaps that's the most important thing that can be said that ties the Day of Ascension and Mother's Day together.