**Gospel:** John 17:6-19

”I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

11And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. 14I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

**Message**: That They May Be One

This is Ascension Sunday, celebrating Jesus miraculous and mysterious return to heaven. Why is this so significant? We want to rush straight to Pentecost, accept the baptism of fire, and head out into the world. It’s like trying to bypass Good Friday, what to do on that Saturday other than coloring eggs, and going straight to Easter morning. We need time to absorb all the nuances.This time after the resurrection is a continuation of the narrative that began with the angel, Gabriel, announcing to Mary that she would be the mother of the promised Messiah, miraculously conceived through the mysterious power of the Spirit of God. Jesus, the Word that was with God and was God from the very beginning of everything in this time-space continuum, entered the daily flow of human existence. Jesus **descended,** or came among us from heaven. He was on a mission to bring the words of the Law to life. No longer words on tablets or in scrolls, no longer a to-do list or a not-to-do list, but the living breathing touchable person, God With Us, in a personal relationship with each individual. Jesus came to live the “**why**” we do what the Ten Commandments tell us we must do. He lived the loving Trinitarian relationship with Almighty God and the beauty of the kingdom of God. He taught, he healed, he fed and even those closest to him didn’t get it during three years of being with him. So, how did this band of back-water Galileans manage to have so much wisdom and insight seemingly instantaneously?

Luke continues his narrative in the Book of Acts (Acts of the Apostles, but really the acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles). “He (Jesus) presented himself alive to them . . .***giving instructions*** , , ,appearing to them during forty days”. It was an intense review course (prep course for Graduate Record Exams) probably revisiting all he had said and done prior to his suffering and relating it to all God had intended from the beginning. Luke continues, “***While staying with them.***” This was quality time, not just popping in and out now and then for a fish dinner.) He taught them with unveiled words about the kingdom of God from the beginning of time. Now they are getting it. If you want to know what they had been taught, read the Epistles—Romans, Ephesians, Galatians, Colossians, Corinthians, Thessalonians, etc (they are written letters, epistles are not female apostles). These letters were written **before** the gospels were compiled. These are the messages of Jesus Christ and the reign of God the apostles took to Jerusalem and all the world.

But wait! There’s more! Jesus said they needed more than just a lesson plan. Before they were dispersed into the world, there was one more gift to be given. Stay in Jerusalem; **wait**, while all this information is settling and solidifying into your brains; discuss all of this among yourselves. Jesus knew they needed to establish cognitive pathways and the best way to do that is group processing and discussion (Ed. 101). It is easier to remember and recall information if you verbalize it, say it out loud. Yes, they had witnessed all of Jesus’ ministry and his suffering. They had seen him in the resurrected flesh. However, Jesus was not going to let them rely on their own cognitive ability or memory. “**You** will be baptized by the Holy Spirit. . . .**You** will receive power . . .” Not only will the Holy Spirit guide you and remind you of all you have been taught; in all your teaching and ministries, **in times of trial**, the Holy Spirit will tell you what to say. When I was still teaching, I told the girls (Catholic School) that in times of trial and testing (finals, regent’s exams, SATs) the Holy Spirit would give them utterance, **but** they had to put the information in their brains first. That required intentional active learning and studying. Not much different from the time of the apostles. Jesus knows what we need before we do.

We await the celebration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We have read how the apostles and the crowds reacted on that day. It was quite dramatic. How have you experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Last week, the baptism was observed in Cornelius and his family/friends by their spontaneous speaking in tongues and praising God. I don’t speak in tongues. I’ve never experienced anyone speaking in tongues, unless it was Larry’s grandfather saying table grace in Pennsylvania German. All I could decipher was, “*Du gutt und rechtes Gott*” and “*Amen*.” Anything in between was strictly with him and the Lord. You may or may not have the gift of tongues, whether to speak or interpret. There are other gifts of the Spirit for which we praise God, as did Cornelius et al. There is the gift of teaching, the gift of faith, healing, doing powerful works, speaking God’s word, discerning between the Holy Spirit and false spirits. All these and more are gifts **because** Jesus ascended and told us to wait. With some introspection, spend some quiet time this week and reflect on how the Holy Spirit works in you and give thanks.

And there is still more. On the night before he suffered and died, he prayed for those who had gathered in the upper room for dinner, and by extension, for us. Jesus spoke directly to God saying that he (Jesus) had had done all that God had sent him to do: he had made God’s name known, not just the name but also the character and person of God. He assured God (not that G needed that assurance) that the disciples knew everything God had given Jesus regarding the truth that he had come from God. Knowing what lay ahead, Jesus recapped that he had completed all that God had sent him to do. Now it’s time for God to be glorified. Perhaps we should take time here and there to look back and see what God may have accomplished so far through us and give thanks. Jesus continued in prayer to ask God to protect those who had been given to him. *Protect and sanctify them, set them apart and make them holy since they are to be sent into the world as you sent me*. One more thing, that they may have **my joy**, complete and utter joy in relationship with you as I have. We have discussed the difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is based on circumstance: all your favorite people come to your birthday party with really great presents, or life is going along smoothly. Joy is based on faith, that no matter what life throws at you, you are confident (blessed assurance) in God’s love, presence, courage, strength, wisdom.

God raised Jesus from death. Jesus now is ascending, raised from our sight, returning to heaven from where he came, passing through that thin veil that our human eyes cannot see through clearly. Jesus is returning to that perfect mutuality of God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, to again be ONE. And in this prayer, he asks that we too may be raised up and included in this mutuality. That you and I may be one with God, one with each other until Christ comes in final victory. The Lord be with you. Amen.

**Prayers of the People/the Lord’s Prayer**: Almighty God, your blessed Son, Jesus Christ, ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things. Mercifully give us faith to perceive that according to his promise, he abides with his Church on earth, to the end of the world, loving us, healing us and strengthening us and to continue to teach us to pray, “Our Father . . .”

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**: God of us all, we bless your name for sending the light and strength of your Holy Spirit. We give thanks and praise for all the gifts great and small that you have poured out on your people. Accept these gifts we offer today to be living praise and witness to our love throughout all the earth in Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever. Amen.

**Benediction**: God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

**New Testament**: Acts 1:1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning 2until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3After 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. 4While 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; 5for 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?” 7He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8But 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.” 9When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11They 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.”

**Epistle**: Ephesians 1:11-23

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory. I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason 16I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 17I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. 20God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.