

## Encounters with Christ

### Part 6: The Upper Room

Acts 1:12-26

1. Prayer meeting.

- All
- Constant
- Together
- Prayer

2. Resulted in.

- Fellowship with and in Christ
- Guidance for Administration of the Church
- Preparation

3. Fully moved from fear to faith, and next comes filling.

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West Valley Church  
5/29/2022  
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## Encounters with Christ Part 6: The Upper Room<sup>1</sup>

Last week Pastor Jason shared with us about the ascension of Jesus into heaven – when Jesus gathered with the disciples to teach them one last time, and then he went up into the clouds. So that's where we left off last week – with the disciples, standing there looking up in the sky after Jesus had ascended and disappeared beyond the clouds.

And then suddenly two angels were standing alongside them saying, "Why are you standing here looking up into an empty sky? Jesus will come back to you just like he left. So get busy." (That's my paraphrase).

There's an old story about turkeys that says that, as a creature, they lack intelligence so much that if there is a rainstorm, they will go outside, look up at the sky with their beaks hanging open, and will stay that way for several minutes until they eventually drown from looking at the rain.

That's kind of the image that we get of the disciples – I mean, if it were raining on that day of the ascension, they might have drowned!

But the truth is, that story about turkeys is just a myth – they don't really do that. And similarly, I think there is a myth that the disciples lived in a more primitive time, so they were not as intelligent as us. But that's as incorrect as that story about turkeys. The disciples *were* as intelligent as you and me – maybe more so in many ways. Of course, they didn't have the technology that we have, so they didn't have as much information at their fingertips like we do, but I wouldn't say that's made us any smarter (you can safely argue that it's done the opposite!). The disciples were *real* people, with as much or more intelligence and self-awareness as we have. And they were doing everything they could to take in and process all that was going on from the time of Jesus' resurrection until up to the point of his ascension and where we are today.

Why have we been in this sermon series? Because we all struggle with fear and uncertainty, but we want to grow in our faith, and we want to know what it means to be truly filled with God's presence in our lives through the Holy Spirit. And we've seen that the disciples went from real fear, to growing faith, on their way to being filled with the Spirit. We can learn from them.

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<sup>1</sup> Resources:

- Francis Dixon, <https://www.wordsoflife.co.uk/bible-studies/study-6-disciples-prayer-upper-room/>  
- Philip A. Bence, *Acts: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1998)  
- John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)  
- Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985)

That's why we've been travelling with Jesus' disciples between Easter Sunday – the day of Christ's resurrection from the dead, to Pentecost Sunday – the day that the Holy Spirit was poured out on believers, marking the inauguration of the New Testament Church (next Sunday is the anniversary of that event). That event set the bar for us as believers, showing what we can expect God to do in our lives, too. So let me just give us a quick review of where we've been: we began by looking at the two disciples on the road to Emmaus on that Sunday afternoon after Jesus had died. Remember that we talked about how, in that day and that encounter with Christ, those two went from fear to growing faith as they realized who Jesus was, and that he truly did rise from the dead. The next Sunday we looked at the disciple Thomas, and how he didn't let his doubt give way to fear, but instead he used it to affirm his faith in Christ, and as a result he fully surrendered himself to the risen Christ.

The third Sunday we compared the responses of Peter and Judas, about how they both had encounters with the risen Christ, but Judas was controlled by his fear and shame, which led him to eventually committed suicide, while Peter worked through his fear and shame and was restored in his faith, soon to be filled with the Spirit.

Two weeks ago Pastor April shared with us the encounter the disciples had with Jesus when he commissioned them to make disciples of everyone, which set the pattern for our lives as well. Pastor April shared her own personal testimony of her own call to ministry. Then last week, on our second Sunday that I was out, Pastor Jason talked about the significance of when Jesus ascended into heaven, showing us the Old Testament imagery and fulfillment in that event.

So that brings us to our passage for today. We find it in Acts 1, right after the ascension, and it starts with verse 12 to the end of the chapter. If you have your Bibles or Bible apps you will want to go this passage, because it's what we'll be digging into. But to start, I want to read it to us, and I'd like to ask you to show honor to God's Word by standing as I read, please. Thank you!

Here's what the passage says:

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James' son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, "Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and shared in our ministry."

(With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open, and all his intestines spilled

out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

“For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms: “‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and, “‘May another take his place of leadership.’ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:12-26, niv)

If you are thankful that this is the Word of God for the people of God, then say “thanks be to God” with me – Thanks be to God! You can have a seat; thank you for standing.

Okay, let’s find out what was going on with the disciples and what they were doing so we can apply it to our lives.

First, after they realized that Jesus wasn’t coming right back, where did they go? They went back to Jerusalem (which was about 3/5<sup>th</sup> of a mile – “a sabbath’s day’s journey”), to a room where they all met together. This could have been any upper room; it wasn’t unusual for homes and buildings to have a second story roof or room for larger gatherings. But this wasn’t just any second story room in the city; the odds are really good that this was the *same house* where they had met with Jesus on the night that he was arrested – the room that they had the last supper with Jesus in – and it was the *same* room that Jesus first appeared to them after his resurrection (remember – without Thomas, and then again with Thomas).

Why did they go back to *that* room? Well first of all that upper room was a meaningful place for them. As the reality started to sink in that Jesus wouldn’t be coming back right away, they went to one of the last places they’d been with Jesus – a place with really significant meaning for them.

I can understand that. Shelly and I were on vacation for the last two weeks – our first vacation in three years. We went to Hawaii, which is always a great place to be. We were at our favorite island – the Big Island. But it was a significant place for us, too. The last time we were there was in January of 2019. We were on vacation there with my parents, and it was then that we saw my mom had some symptoms and we urged her to go to the doctor. It was just a month and a half later that she was diagnosed with brain cancer, and most of you know she died last September – two and a half years later. When we knew it was likely to be fatal, I asked my mom if there was anything left that she wanted to do, and she said she wanted to go to Hawaii one last time. She loved it there, so we booked flights and rooms for us. Then Covid hit and we had to cancel. We rescheduled two more times before we had to give up altogether, because of Covid. She never made it back, although that’s

where she wants her ashes to be scattered. But this was *our* first time back, without my parents. And it was meaningful to be in that same place. Being in those familiar places brought back good memories and helped us feel connected to mom. It also helped us move forward. I'm sure there was a lot of that kind of thing going on for the disciples in that upper room.

But the disciples also went to that room because they were obeying Jesus; they were doing exactly what Jesus had commanded them to do in verse 14. When Jesus told them to go there and wait for the promise, he knew it would help them put things into place in their minds and hearts, remind them of their purpose, and prepare them for the great things that were ahead for them.

How long were they up there? Ten days. We know that, because Jesus' resurrection was on Passover weekend, then Jesus ascended forty days from his resurrection. Passover to Pentecost is fifty days (Pentecost means fifty, as Jason told us last week). So the disciples were gathered in that room from Jesus' ascension until Pentecost Sunday – ten days. We don't really know if they remained there exclusively and never left the room, or if some came and went, bringing food and drink...but we know that when they weren't taking care of personal essentials, they spent those ten days in that room.

What were they doing in there? Well, essentially, they were having a ten-day...

### 1. ***Prayer meeting.***

Sometimes *some* great things happen in life and in the church *without* prayer, just because of the sheer grace of God. But *every* earnest prayer always results in great things. *(repeat)*

Let me interrupt myself to say something here: this school shooting in Texas is a shocking, tragic, horrific thing. I don't understand the actions and inactions by those who were there, if what I read is true. I can't begin to imagine what those families are going through. I don't understand why our country leads the world in this kind of thing. Sadly, I think I understand why politicians who are supposed to be lawmakers don't ever seem to do anything about it, one way or the other. I also understand why so many people in our society and on social media are saying, "*no more thoughts and prayers; we need action.*" I understand how they *feel*, but listen: *I will never let the unsaved world tell me when I can and can't pray.* **Prayer is not the only thing we can do, but it is one thing we MUST do.** *(repeat)* Of course unbelievers think that nothing happens when we pray; I wouldn't expect them to have faith in a God who answers prayer. But believers in Jesus know much differently: things DO happen when we pray.

So the disciples had a ten-day prayer meeting. There, in that upper room that was so familiar to them and had so many memories and important moments, it would have

been an easier place for them to maintain the habits of interacting with each other and with God that they had formed when Jesus was there with them.<sup>2</sup>

*These rooms that we gather in to worship and pray – both in our own personal daily times of prayer and our weekly times together as the church to worship and pray and declare God’s Word – these rooms that we gather in are valuable and orienting for us. I might add that it is also true if you are joining us in a virtual room on our online campus; if you can’t be with us in person, gathering that way will help you, too.*

One author says, “It is in such upper rooms that the greatest business in the world is transacted by the Church, under the presidency of the Holy Spirit, where humble believers meet and bow before the Lord ready to do His will. In many respects, this eve-of-Pentecost prayer meeting was a model one, and it will help us to note some of its characteristics.”<sup>3</sup> So let’s take his advice and see what was happening in that prayer meeting so we can learn from it.

First, notice the word...

***all.***

It was more than the eleven; it was them plus other committed followers of Jesus, men and women, and verse 15 tells us that altogether there were about 120 of them. Whenever the church gathers for prayer, it ought to be all of us – men, women, young, old, leaders in the church and new believers.

Next, notice the word...

***constant.***

They persevered in their prayers. Again, we are not told that they all lived up there, locked in that room for ten days, praying day and night. We know they weren’t because of what else they did. But still, God tells us in his Word that they were constantly in prayer. This is the same thing they were doing in Acts 12:5-17, when they were praying for Peter while he was in prison for preaching the gospel, and when he was miraculously set free.

The point is this: as a church, there are times that we gather for prayer that are important; they are longer than the ten second prayer, “Lord bless so and so, amen.” We need extended times of prayer. And we can remain in constant prayer in our hearts and minds even when we are busy doing other things for God and people.

Next, notice that they prayed...

***together.***

This describes a couple of things that are important for us to know: one is that they were in the same place. Again, when we gather for worship, or when we have set times of prayer, it is important for us to be in the room together. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 10:25...

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<sup>2</sup> Bence

<sup>3</sup> Dixon

“Some people have given up the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that. We should keep on encouraging each other, especially since you know that the day of the Lord's coming is getting closer.”  
(Hebrews, 10:25, cev)

But that word “together” is about more than geography; it is also describing that they prayed with one heart and mind. There was unity about what they prayed for, and there was love and commitment between them. Love filled their hearts and they enjoyed unity in the Spirit (see Ephesians 4:3, Matthew 5:23-24 and Psalms 133).

Let me go back to the example of that horrible shooting in Texas. When you and I pray about that, we might not be in agreement about *what* should be done; one of us may think it means more gun control and the other may think it means that teachers should have guns. But we *can* set those things aside and *pray in unity* (in fact, we **MUST** set those things aside). We are unified in that we pray for God's Kingdom of love to come; for evil in this world to be defeated, for the grieving to be comforted, and for God's love to abound. We can pray for wisdom and for action from our leaders. And we can do that *while* we disagree politically. In fact, if we cannot do that, we are not really Christians.

Finally, don't forget the word...

### **prayer.**

They still had lots and lots of unanswered questions. But they didn't fret over what they couldn't control or predict; they went to the One who knew the future. They went to the One who held their purpose. Compare that to their time in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane just a month and a half earlier; they were falling asleep while Jesus agonized. *This* prayer meeting together shows that they were growing from fear to faith!

And this tells us that prayer is comprehensive; it includes praise, worship, thanksgiving, adoration, confession, petition, intercession, and even relational interaction with business and action.

I'll say this again before we move on: our times to gather together like this on Sunday mornings, and our monthly times of prayer like we have planned for this Wednesday evening here in the Worship Center at 6:30pm – these are times that are *very* important for us all to be in constant prayer together, especially as things get more challenging in our lives and in our world. So please – don't miss the times that we set to pray and worship. It is good for you, it is being obedient to Christ, and it results in great things. In fact, let's look quickly and what this ten-day prayer meeting...

## **2. Resulted in.**

There are some clear results that the passage tells us about, which we can expect when we meet together for worship and prayer, too.

One of those results was greater...

## **fellowship with and in Christ.**

Fellowship is a word in the Bible that describes “the unity of the Spirit that comes from Christians’ shared beliefs, convictions, and behaviors. When those shared values are in place, genuine ... (biblical fellowship) occurs. This fellowship produces our mutual cooperation in God’s worship, God’s work, and God’s will being done in the world.”<sup>4</sup> There is a spiritual unity and synergy that happens between each other by the Spirit. We see this by how many times in the passage that we read that it repeats the word “with” (see also 1 John 1:7 and Revelation 3:20). There is supernatural togetherness that we experience when we gather with each other for worship and prayer!

The second result of this upper room prayer meeting was...

## **guidance for administration of the church.**

You might be tempted to think that when they selected Matthias to take the place of Judas (verses 14-26), that Peter and the others stopped praying and instead were taking care of some organizational administrivia; but verse 24 tells us that wasn’t the case at all; they were still in the Spirit, because we are told it was “good to the Holy Spirit.” And it’s significant that later in Acts 6:2 we read about “The Twelve”. God still intended for there to be twelve apostles as the fulfillment of the twelve tribes, and the Holy Spirit knew that Matthias was there with “the eleven”. The lesson for us is obvious: only where there is united prayer on the part of the believers can there be the accomplishing of God’s will in and through the Church. Without praying, wrong decisions will be made, we will be working in our own wisdom and God’s work will be hindered. But with prayer the work of God will go forward, and the will of God will be accomplished in and through us.

Finally, we also need to see that this time of prayer was...

## **preparation**

...for the believers. There may be times when we have lots of questions, and we think we are just sitting around with nothing to do. We might think that prayer is just keeping busy or filling the air with pointless words because, well, we might as well be doing *something* spiritual. But don’t be mistaken; EVERY prayer we pray, every time we spend together in prayer, God uses it to prepare us individually and as a church for greater things. In this case with the disciples, of course we know that it prepared them for the day of Pentecost and the filling of the Holy Spirit. But please understand, every moment spent in prayer allows the Spirit to move more deeply and powerfully in your life and prepares you for greater things. We can expect that in our lives.

In this ten-day prayer meeting, we see that the disciples have...

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<sup>4</sup> <https://seminary.grace.edu/understanding-biblical-christian-fellowship/#:~:text=Koinonia%20describes%20the%20unity%20of,being%20done%20in%20the%20world.>



**3. *Fully* moved from *fear* to *faith*, and next comes *filling*** (of the Holy Spirit, which we will see next week!).

This upper room prayer meeting is a more urgent than ever example for us, together, West Valley Church. Our world needs God to do great things through his people right here in this community. So next Sunday we will see exactly what that filling with the Holy Spirit is, why it is so important, and how it is available to us.

*Prayer*

*Reminder of the prayer meeting this Wednesday night for one hour. Please come join us in prayer.*