

Sermon May 17, 2026  
John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. 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. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, for 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. I 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. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And 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.

Rising Hope; Grounded Love

Today, Jesus looks at his friends who are anxious, uncertain, and not at all ready for what comes next. He says, "*I am coming to you no longer, but I am sending you into the world.*" It is a tender moment... a commissioning moment. A moment where heaven leans close to earth. Jesus does not talk about absence. He offers us hope that rises and a love that stays grounded. It's the promise that we are never alone!

Jesus rises not to leave, but to make room... room for courage, room for Spirit, room for us.

Jesus tells the disciples that *"I will not leave you orphaned... I am with you always... My joy is in you... As the Father has sent me, so I send you."*

Do not focus on the departing Jesus... on the empty skies. Look at the radical transformation that occurs as Jesus rises. Jesus rises so that the Spirit can breathe through us. Jesus rises so that the work of love can continue... not from above, but from within. We should not look helplessly up at the empty skies, but to look down to find the footprints we are called to follow.

As Jesus ascends, our hopes rise!

As Jesus is lifted up, the disciples are left gazing into the heavens. They stand there in amazement until an angel comes to them, "Why do you stand looking toward heaven?" Why are you standing there like a bunch of fools, when you have important work to do, here on earth!

As Jesus rises up to the clouds, we are given a broader perspective on our lives, our world, our calling. It's like the pictures we see of earth taken from space. We see God's creation in its entirety. Rather than focus on personal promises of salvation and well-being, the ascended Jesus challenges us to something new: *to bring heaven to earth*. To live Jesus' values in our world, or as we pray each for "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." When we live from a higher perspective, we can see beyond our own self-interest to embrace the well-being of the whole earth, including strangers, enemies, and non-humans.

Albrecht Altdorfer's picture of Jesus' ascension hangs in the British museum. It is a black and white etched woodcut, and it portrays Jesus rising up as the disciples watch him disappear into the clouds. But, if you look closely at the picture, you can see footprints on the ground below Jesus' feet. Carefully etched, Jesus' footprints are down on the disciples' level where they are standing with their mouths open.

"Why do you stand looking up into heaven? You have work to do, right here right now. Look at these footprints here on the earth. Follow them and you

will know what to do." Jesus' muddy footprints are all over the pages of the gospels.

- Jesus' footprints are in the wilderness. Tempted to claim earthly power and glory, he reached up and grasped the sacred words of God. One does not live by bread alone. Worship the Lord your God and serve only God.
- Jesus continues to walk on the wrong side of the street with the wrong people, no matter how often he is criticized, leaving a trail of footprints all along the way.
- Jesus leaves footprints under a sycamore tree, where he looked up at a tax collector, perched in the branches, and said "Come on down because I'm going to your house for dinner! And, Zacchaeus follows.
- Jesus keeps walking towards Jerusalem... towards Calgary... towards the cross.
- And when all seems lost, his footprints guide us to Galilee and beyond, loving us to the very end.

The footprints are always there, ready to lead us and show us the way. But we can only see them from the wide-angle perspective that the ascension gives us.

The Spirit that anointed Jesus so many years ago, now anoints you and me. That's what Jesus tried to tell his disciples before he left them. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses. Witnesses to the Gospel on this earth, where I left my footprints. Follow them and you will follow me!"

We are called to follow... The world can be such a messy place, filled with despair and anger and violence. Sometimes that messiness seeps into our lives and even into the church, because we are a part of this messy world. When times get rough, we can stand looking up into the empty skies or we can believe the promise of Jesus. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses." You will make

footprints in and through ordinary, imperfect communities of faith. You will make footprints in the places where there is need. You will make footprints in the aftermath of tornados and floods. You will leave footprints in cancer wards and homeless shelters. You will leave footprints in the church and in your home. You will leave footprints in all the places where hearts are broken and bodies are wounded. You will leave footprints for others to follow.

Today, we are called to "go up"—to find higher ground, but not to escape Earth's crises. When we look from a new perspective, we gain a vision and mission that is larger than ourselves or our communities.

Don't look up into the empty skies... look down at the footprints left behind. Our mission is to heal, to embrace, to welcome, and to love. The ever-present God is right here, giving us all the guidance and inspiration we need, if we just look beyond ourselves. Right here and right now can be the day of transformation and fulfillment. Just look for and follow the footsteps. They will never lead you astray.