

**Westminster Presbyterian Church + 533 S. Walnut St. + Springfield, IL 62704**

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May 4, 2008

### **Come Back To Earth**

Acts 1: 6-14

Can you believe it's been 40 days? On Thursday it was 40 days since Easter. It is what we in the church call Ascension Day and it is when we remember Jesus' trip back to his Father. He was on the earth for 40 days following his resurrection and he spent much of his time teaching his followers more about the kingdom of God. Scripture also tells us that he spent much of this time convincing them this was all true, offering proofs of his life, death and life after death. In this final moment together Jesus offers his disciples proof that all of this has been for real. Remember, nobody made it to Jesus' resurrection. By the time Mary got there, or Peter, the event was over: Jesus was raised. Now, 40 days later, the disciples get to witness Jesus' power for themselves. They get to see him ascend.

Many believe this trip to the heavens took place on the Mount of Olives, the highest point in Jerusalem. Because of this the area is also called the Mount of Ascension and there has been a church built on it since the year 390. Within the walls of this little chapel is a slab of stone and on the stone is an impression of a right foot. For centuries many have believed it is Jesus' footprint, left behind as he pressed off toward heaven. This smudged and heavily damaged imprint is a pilgrimage site for thousands upon thousands of faithful people each year and though we may find it strange to imagine Jesus leaving foot-shaped depressions in rock wherever he stepped, for many this spot is as near to heaven as we can get—Jesus' last step on earth as he joined his Father. We can remember their last glimpse of him as he rose.

Of course, as the two men in white remind the disciples (and us), this is not the time for last glimpses. This is not the time for looking to heaven. Remember, just as the disciples are craning their necks to see Jesus leave two men arrive and ask them why they are spending their time looking up. Frankly, you would have thought it would be obvious why they were looking up. There was quite a lot to see as Jesus ascended! But the men stop them from their gazing; reminding them that Jesus is gone and spending time watching the heavens has come to an end as well. The 40 days are up and class is over. That's what the 40 days really was after all: class time for Jesus to teach his disciples; a last opportunity to share his message and mission with them before he left the earth. Now that time has passed and a beaten up footprint in the rock provides some of the last evidence of Christ on earth.

Of course a beat-up print pales in comparison to all of the life changing impressions Jesus has left on this earth. The ascension moment is but a mere shadow of the footprints Christ has pressed into our existence. So come back to that, the two men tell us. Come back to earth where the real work happened.

Just think of all the work Christ accomplished for us! Think of all his footprints he has left on the world. First and foremost, he has provided a pathway to our Creator. In his life and work he has given us access to God the Father so we can live in a right relationship. Because of Christ we can also be in relationship with one another. Through him we can be brothers and sisters to one another, children of a common Father. Christ's message has also imprinted new meaning to our lives. Christ

gives our lives a purpose. He has left his imprint on our eyes as well. He has given each of us the vision to see what God's kingdom could be like as well as the eyes to see how our world falls short of this vision. These many and varied and deep footprints litter our existence and, through Christ's power, change the landscape. The world is not the same as before he came.

As his followers we get the opportunity to leave a few marks ourselves. When we stop stargazing and, instead, follow his steps, we can even begin leaving some faint prints of our own. Whenever we treat a stranger as family we leave a mark. Whenever we point to God rather than ourselves we leave a mark. "Come back to earth," the men in white tell us—"so you can leave a mark."

It reminds me of a children's book I have read quite often lately, a book by Max Lucado. He describes these wooden people called Wemmicks and Wemmicks spend all their days placing on one another either shiny gold stars or dull gray dots. When they interact with each other they leave one or the other on the person they meet. As we leave our own faint marks on this world we must strive to leave stars of praise, justice and mercy and not dots of envy or meanness.

Let's be honest, though. We know not all of our prints glow golden! Some are quite dark and dull. Even when we try our best and we feel we are sending stars out, one upon another, we can see, once they land, that they still grow a bit gray. Our footprints are so often just as beaten up and warped as that print on top of the Mount of Olives. We know we cannot solve all the problems we see around us. We cannot even solve all of our own problems! We can only leave a few faint prints, a few golden marks, as we wait for the day when the dots won't exist; a day when even the stars won't matter because the mark of Christ's cross will cover all. His sacrifice and his love will be the only lasting mark. We wait for that day. No we yearn for that day. We pray for that day, when Jesus will come back to earth. Amen.