

The Ascension – What’s That?

Luke 24:44-53, Acts 1:1-11

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

May 13, 2018 – The Ascension of Our Lord (Observed)



In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. A few years ago the editor of a magazine, similar to “The Lutheran Witness,” had a big editorial about how ironic it was that Ascension Day had happened to fall on a Thursday that year. The author went on and on about how unfortunate it was that with the Ascension being a Christian holy day we don’t celebrate it with as much fanfare as Christmas or Easter – and then he went on further about how, because Ascension Day fell on a Thursday that year, it would be largely ignored. The next month came the red-faced retraction. Apparently the author of that piece hadn’t realized that the Ascension of Our Lord is *always* celebrated forty days after Easter, and *always* falls on a Thursday!

That embarrassed author, however, *was* right about one thing. Although the Ascension *is* one of the major Christian holy days, we *don’t* celebrate it with as much fanfare as Christmas or Easter. That’s why, in most congregations today, Ascension is oftentimes celebrated on the Sunday following. Perhaps that’s because we don’t really know what the Ascension is all about. Maybe we *are* like so many others who ask: “The Ascension? What’s that?” We know Christmas is when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. We know Easter is the Day Jesus rose from the dead. But what about the Ascension? What does it mean? Well, first of all, it means Christ’s work of redemption is *complete*. The letter to the Hebrews teaches concerning the Ascension that after Jesus provided purification for sins, He then sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Now in our country the Food and Drug Administration regulates the amount of contaminants – such as insect body parts and other impurities – that can be in a particular food and still be classified as “pure and unadulterated.” God, however, has a much higher standard. Before you can be granted admission into heaven, God requires absolute purity – 100% holiness – with *no* trace amounts of sin allowed at all. And of course, we’ve

all failed this test, because we’ve all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

There is *nothing* you can do to purify yourself or make up for your sin. But Jesus Christ has done all that for you! As both Victim and Priest He purified you in His sacrifice on the cross to atone for the sin of all – a one-time sacrifice for sin standing for all eternity. And now His Ascension to the right hand of the Father shows us that His work of redemption is complete. That’s why the author of the book of Hebrews says: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Next, Christ’s Ascension means that *the God-Man, Jesus, is your King*. While here on earth, He didn’t always or fully use His divine power, but instead humbled Himself even to the point of death – yes, death on a cross. Hence Christ’s Ascension marks the end of His earthly humiliation and the glorification of His human nature. Not only as God, but also as man, He alone is the mighty Ruler of all things. So, “God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

And when the Scriptures speak about Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father, they aren’t referring to a physical reality but a spiritual one. In ancient times, kings would often have a “right hand man” who, literally sitting on the king’s right, had the power and authority to rule over his kingdom. So when we say in the Creed that Christ “sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,” what we mean is that the God-Man, Jesus Christ, has absolute power and authority. As the Divine One He rules over all creation and people – both believers and unbelievers. And He is also absolute Ruler

over the spirit world where angels, authorities and powers also submit to Him.

While to us this world may appear to be completely out of control and running amuck – and though it may seem that the devil and his demons are free to attack us at will – the reality is that Christ *is* still in complete control. His rule is far above all other rule, authority, power and dominion – not only in the present age but also in the age to come. So, why do things in this world happen the way they do? Paul tells us God placed all things under Christ's feet and appointed Him to be Head over everything for sake of the Church. So, everything that happens in this world is for the sake of the Church – for the protection, blessing and benefit of God's Christian people – yes, for the protection, blessing and benefit of *you* as an individual member of Christ's bride, the Church.

That's why St. Paul wrote that "God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose." You may not be able to comprehend how all the things in this world are working together for your ultimate good, yet, as a Christian you have to understand and trust that Christ, our king, *is* doing exactly that as He rules over all things. As St. Peter stated so clearly in His Pentecost sermon: "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of that fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, and has poured out what you now see and hear." Christ is the Founder, Ruler and Head of His Church. And by the working of the Holy Spirit, He empowers the Church to serve Him and bear witness of all that He has done to save us poor, wretched, fallen sinners. "God exalted Him to His own right hand to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel."

Next, Christ's Ascension means that He is interceding *for you*. Paul says in his letter to the Church at Rome: "Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." In ancient kingdoms, it was the job of the "right hand man" to receive petitions and requests and pass them on to the king. In the throne room one would not address the king directly, but had to speak to the king through his "right hand man." Jesus has taught us, saying: "The Father will give you whatever you ask in My

name." In other words, the Father's "Right Hand Man" is there to accept and hear your prayers and petitions – and also to intercede with the Father on *your behalf*. And because of His Son's righteousness, you may be both sure and certain that God the Father hears and acts on your prayers for His Son's sake.

And the one thing Jesus especially pleads with the Father for is your forgiveness – even as St. John wrote: "If anybody does sin, we have One who pleads with the Father for us – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the Atoning Sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world." And it's because of this that we want to look at the final thing Christ's Ascension means – and that's namely, that *He will come again*. Jesus says: "In that Day you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." And so likewise, the angels said to the disciples as He was being lifted up into heaven: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go." And finally, John says in his Revelation concerning that Day: "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him."

On the Last Day, dear Christian, Jesus *will* come again. And this Second Coming could occur at any moment. When He comes again, heaven and earth will pass away, all the dead will be raised and judged, and you and all believers in Christ will enter into eternal life. That's why St. Paul so vehemently encourages and directs us in his letter to the Church at Colossae: "Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

So again, what does Christ's Ascension mean? It means His work of redemption is *complete* – and that it's complete *for you*! It means that Jesus, the God-man, is *King – your King*! It means that Jesus is *interceding* – and that He's interceding *especially for you*. And it means Jesus *will come again*! And on that Day, when Christ who is your Life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory! And *all this will happen* for the sake of His name. Amen.