

May 1, 2016
Sermon for Sixth Sunday of Easter (Ascension Observed)
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Ephesians 1:15-23

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Ephesians 1:15–23 (ESV)

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,
¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,
¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far 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 one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

One of the great things about kids is their sense of imagination and wonder. When they play, they play the parts of kings and queens, army generals, and pro athletes. In front yards across Texas parents witness a touchdown pass from Peyton Manning to Reggie Wayne. And, regular old bedrooms become fairy-tale kingdoms ruled by princesses.

So it is—children think about all possibilities, and the sky's the limit.

But, as we get older, reality starts to kick in. Maybe I'm not going to be president after all. And the odds that I'll play for the Cowboys, frankly, look pretty slim.

You climb up the professional ladder, and then, one day, you come to see that you've gone as high as you're gonna get, and from that point on, you do your best just to hang on.

The same goes for health. You grow for a while in height and in strength, but then it becomes a matter of maintenance, and then you start looking good . . . for your age.

So it seems the further along you get in life, the less you think about success, and the more you gear yourself for survival.

In our Epistle Text, we see Ephesus. Paul's third missionary journey, which could be called his most successful stop anywhere. For more than two years, Paul labored in Ephesus, one of the great Roman cities of Asia Minor, on the west coast of what is now Turkey.

There he salvaged a misguided pseudo-Christian sect, drew a huge following to his healing miracles, brought magicians of the occult to repentance; apparently, Paul was winning the city for the Gospel (Acts 19:20).

So successful was he, in fact, that he awakened the wrath of Artemis—or at least of her followers, the silversmiths of Ephesus who made their riches selling statues of this pagan goddess. All right, Artemis was nothing to fear, but the people of Ephesus sure thought she was.

Her temple in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In addition to being the goddess of the moon and the hunt, she was believed to send plague and death among men and animals. Sudden deaths, especially those of women, are described as the effect of her arrows. Her “reign” inspired fear! And *truly* to be feared were her followers!

When they incited the whole city to riot, suddenly Paul’s great successes, the fledgling Church, seemed tiny and helpless. They are in survival mode at times but as we see in our text, they know that the ascended Christ is ruling: ²¹ *far 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 one to come.* ²² *And he put all things under his feet...*”

Now back to our time and age... learning or realizing that you have reached your peak is not all bad. For with age and time comes wisdom.

And, along the way, people find out that it doesn’t really matter if you become king of the hill. You come to see that the best things in this life are simple gifts— friends, family, church. There’s no need for a lavish feast or a million-dollar home. A simple meal among loved ones will do just fine. It’s not always about success, or keeping up with the Joneses or even trying to be one up on your neighbor. Thanks be to God for the simple gifts.

But that having been said, we should never completely lose that childlike sense of adventure and wonder. There are opportunities all around us. Whether as individuals or as a church, we can remember that, even if we’ve gone off in the wrong direction, we can always make a U-turn. And, on the other hand, there’s no reason to rest on our laurels or think a glorious past is our peak; for there lies before us a brighter future. Doors are opening all around us.

And no matter what happens, better things are on the way.

Now, don’t get me wrong. We don’t harbor any illusions. Human nature, this side of the grave, is never going to improve.

I don’t care how many laws we pass or how many self-improvement books we read.

When we look at ourselves in the mirror of the Law, we are painfully aware that original sin remains with us. As Paul says, The good that we would, we don't do, and that which we don't want to do, we end up doing. (Romans 7:19)

It can be downright frustrating!

But there is hope. And that's what Ascension Day is all about. It's the day we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ has risen into heaven and has been crowned the King of kings.

Well, you might say, "Why is that such a big deal? I mean, Jesus is the Son of God. Of course, He's the King."

But, on this day, we remember that the one who rules is one of us. Our Brother, a Man from Nazareth, has been promoted. A member of our family has climbed the ladder to the top. Somebody who knows our sorrows, our frustrations, and our temptations now sits enthroned at the right hand of God.

And that fact bodes very well for our future. You could say that now, we're insiders. It's like being a worker in a company that your uncle happens to own. It's like being the coach's son. Like growing up a Kennedy or a Hilton.

Call it an unfair advantage if you will, but a man, who happens to be our best Friend, rules in heavenly glory. He's made it to the top and has every intention of bringing us along with him.

One of my favorite stories is *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis. Many of you have read the book or seen the movie. In fairy-tale fashion, Lewis tells the story of our salvation. The ruler of Narnia, a majestic Lion, laid down his life to break the dark magic. In the end, Narnia is restored, and four children are crowned and seated on thrones of the kingdom.

And, when you think about it, we are those children. We are destined to rule. The Bible is full of sadness, but the most tragic story comes right at the beginning.

And it isn't a story about a plague or pestilence, rape or murder, exile or wandering. But one simple act of disobedience. Adam and Eve had it all.

They were like the king and queen of all creation, having dominion over the earth. And then, they fell. And when they fell, it was like falling off a cliff. And mankind kept falling down, down, and farther down. Made in God's image, man came to worship images in the forms of men, beasts, birds, and creeping things.

And so it is—sin has brought down the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve. Sin has made us trivial. When we put others down, we only show just how small-minded we've become. When we take what isn't ours, we show how we have become enslaved to ordinary things that have no real meaning. When we covet and crave, we demonstrate just how empty we are inside. When we put so much focus on our clothes and appearance, we show how much we have to cover up. When we harm others, we become less like kings and queens and more like petty dictators and cheap thugs.

But today, the Day of Ascension, we see the light. The heavens have opened up. And now, not even the sky is the limit. For Christ, through His death, has taken our sins of smallness and our pettiness upon Himself.

Though we ignored Him, He was devoted to us. Though we mocked Him, He was big enough to take it. Though we looked down on Him, He lifted us up.

By His resurrection, He has restored our fallen race. And by His ascension into heaven, He gives us a glimpse of our future glory, apart from sin and its meanness.

He shows us life where our hard hearts become soft. When you put on your baptismal gown, however many years ago, you were fitted for royal garments. And, on your confirmation day, as you wore that gown, you were having another dress rehearsal for the glory that awaits.

Once our sin made us lower than the beasts, but now, even the angels envy us. So, pity the world's powers and principalities. Feel bad for all the stars who don't know what we know. They strut around, not knowing that they're just playing dress up.

Meanwhile, we're in line for a promotion that makes theirs seem like child's play. Since our Lord wore a crown of thorns, we'll wear the crown of life.

Go ahead and embrace the future in Christ. Consider the possibilities. Open the doors and walk through. And know that our Lord has great plans for you and for our congregation.

We have a friend in Jesus.

And because Jesus ascended into the Highest Heaven, we will too.

Better things are on the way.

Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through the risen Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Sermon Outline

Because Jesus Ascended into the Highest Heaven, We Will Too.
(Ephesians 1:15–23)

- I. Our childlike wonder dims in the realities of age and original sin.
- II. But at the Ascension, we see our best Friend ruling in heavenly glory, with every intention of bringing us along.
- III. Therefore, we're in line for a promotion that makes the worlds best seem like child's play.