**THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD**

**MARK 16:14-20/ACTS 1:1-11/2KINGS 2:5-15**

**ST PETER’S LUTHERAN CHURCH, WATERFORD – MAY 26, 2022**

In the name of Jesus. Amen. Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!** Risen – and now ascended – still robed in our flesh!

Dear Christians, the ascension of our Lord trumpets the riches of His inheritance in you, His saints. Amid all the things that press you down in this twisted generation, the ascended Christ lifts you up in joyful hope! His witness has done that to you and for you. Our ascended LORD gave promise that His sent ones would witness Him to the end of the earth – and so they have - even to you in Wisconsin. Amid struggles that weary you, proud voices that assault you, false comforts that tempt you, He is your hope! God has gone up with a shout…God sits on the throne of His holiness.

Forty days flowed from His open tomb - the dawn of the new creation - to His exaltation! The forty days of His wilderness tempting by Satan were long past. Fresh from the grave, these forty days are rich with the presence of the risen Christ and His victory over Satan. He appeared to the women – to Peter – to the Emmaus disciples – to the gathered disciples minus Thomas – to them again with unbelieving Thomas. He appeared by the sea and to more than 500 at one time and to James.

*He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs.* We are not given an exhaustive list of those proofs, but you are right to marvel that they saw and touched the wounds of God in the flesh, that He ate and drank with them, that He continued teaching them. He was *seen by them during forty days…speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*  Forty days revealing how Jesus continues to do it all in love for us! Sing to God a hymn of gladness, Sing to God a hymn of praise.

He gave His apostles the message to preach. He also empowered their understanding of it. Forty days to see once again how Jesus must continually heal our spiritual blindness. Forty days to see that our natural faculties (even the faculties of the apostles) are unable to perceive that Jesus is the promised Christ who has completed our salvation. “It is finished!” He cried in saving victory from the cross. But Jesus’ ascension is the first time that He is worshipped in the full knowledge of who He really is – in faith that His cross and His resurrection are the fulfillment of all God’s promises! *And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them.*

As this unfolds, so does the ongoing work of the Holy Trinity! *He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*  This is both marvelous and comforting!

Remember when Jesus began His visible public ministry in the Jordan at His Baptism. The Jordan did not part as when Elijah and Elisha struck it with their shared cloak. But those waters did cloak Jesus with our sin as He began to fulfill all righteousness for us. As He did so, the Father spoke His good pleasure and the Holy Spirit anointed the Son for His work of redemption. The Holy Trinity is there revealed as totally invested in your rescue, as unmistakably for us dying sinners!

Now, at the culmination of Jesus’ visible public ministry the loving action of the Holy Trinity is once again made known. The ministers whom Jesus sends are assured that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit delight in the gifts that He commands them to deliver. Fellow-redeemed, God is gracious and kind beyond our deserving and beyond our expectation.

What Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up, He continues to do and teach through His sent ones. He did not ascend to escape from service to you His church. He ascended to be with you, His beloved bride, more than ever through His word and His promised gifts of forgiveness. The preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins by Pastor Conradt among you is the ongoing ministry of Jesus in your midst. Through God’s Word the Holy Spirit has worked this understanding in your heart and keeps you in the true faith. Without His enlightenment, you would never confess the sinful sludge of your nature or your Savior from sin and death and hell. You would only major in minors.

Even His disciples in these bountiful forty days of many proofs, continued to settle for earthly matters. *Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”*  Jesus gently rebukes them – *“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.”*  Then, He immediately redirects them to His real kingdom work – to His preaching ministry through them – *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me”* It is for this – His real kingdom work – that He teaches you to pray each day - “Thy kingdom come.”

Regarding that profound petition Christ through His sent ones must call out “repent!” For, earth-bound longings as voiced by the disciples come far easier also for you. Lord, will you at this time remove once and for all the Co-vid captivity in our land? Lord, will you at this time restore honesty in government and respect for authority? Lord, will you at this time open deluded minds to the evil, death-dealing nature of communism? Lord, your church is threatened. Will you at this time stop the madness in our culture of depravity and death?

These longings are good! The suffering is real. God grant mercy as He wills and God grant us prayer for the daily welfare of our world and our nation and our neighbor. But none of these carry the weight, the glory, the eternal blessing in what you celebrate this evening! Not even close!And the wondrous truth is that Jesus wants you to see His glory. *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world* (John 17:24). *The things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal*. (2 Cor. 4:18). *Here we have no lasting city but we seek the city that is to come (Hebrews 13:14).* Repentance is surely in order for our dullness to the intense desire of Jesus that we be with Him eternally.

St. Luke further describes…*Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight”* (Acts 1). No ordinary cloud is this! You know the pillar of cloud in the wilderness - the guarantee of God’s presence - and the cloud on the Mount of Christ’s transfiguration. The very exodus that Moses and Elijah there spoke about with Jesus led through His cross and empty tomb to this very cloud. This cloud marks Jesus’ entry into the realm of God as God and man!

The King ascends whence He came – still robed in our flesh and blood. King of kings and Lord of Lords – He is greatly exalted! Beloved of God, *God has gone up with a shout –* as true man! Jesus the Christ has ascended, stepping beyond the veil of time and sight to bless you more than ever. Man with God is on the throne. While remaining man, Jesus is now present and does things in the whole range of God’s way of being present and doing things. Yes – that means He can feed you and tens of thousands of others on Ascension Day with His true body and His true blood at His Table.

The right hand of God to which Jesus ascends is not a far-distant spot where He is tucked away leaving you to carry the load. He does not intend for you to spiritualize His presence with you now in some virtual or symbolic way. Protestant Christianity makes this grievous error and thereby turns God’s richest gifts into pseudo works of man. The right hand of God to which Jesus ascends is full authority in heaven and earth. This is the authority that carries the preaching of the Gospel to your ears! *Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.* This is the authority that makes your baptism a holy washing of forgiveness – the treasure of your being clothed by Christ even to this day (Gal 3:27). *He who believes and is baptized will be saved.* This is the authority that makes gathering for weekly worship the center of earthly life. It is not the mundane matter of going to church as one more thing to do for God but the marvelous moment of meeting with Christ to receive the gifts He brings to you.

His parting from them was limited. It was not a total separation. They will visibly see Him no more – this is clearly communicated! But His promise holds firm – *“I am with you always, to the end of the age”* (Matt. 28:20) – *Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I among them* (Matt 18:20). The parting that makes possible Christ’s presence with us tonight and each Lord’s day is Jesus own parting from the Father at the cross.That was a total separation – a God-forsaken separation caused by the damning wrath of God against sin (your sin/my sin) – which Jesus had become for us! Death at last has met defeat! Now, lifted up from the earth at His ascension He bestows the fruits of his once-for-all sacrifice through means of His choosing. God is kind beyond our deserving and beyond our expectation. *Shout unto God with the voice of triumph!*

As Elijah left Elisha his mantel, Elisha was given a double mouthful of the Spirit for even more and greater prophetic work. In like manner, the Greater Elijah spoke of His works and said to His disciples – *“whoever believes in me will do the works that I do and greater works than these he will do because I go to the Father* (John 14:12). The greater works of Christ’s apostles and church come from the authority of the ascended Christ and the advantage of His sending the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus and declare what is His. The risen Christ quickly mandated His greater and forgiving gifts of Holy Absolution and Holy Baptism and even after His ascension handing over to St. Paul His words of giving Holy Communion (1 Cor. 11:23ff). Through His greater gifts received in faith the ascended Christ continues to do it all – for you! Lives of fear and failure are at the same time lives of good fruit and a blessed future through His power and love.

And now we have an advocate with the Father (1 John 1:2). He always lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God through him (Heb. 7:25). He appears in the presence of God on our behalf. Christ has entered once for all into the holy places…by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. This is why God is always more ready to hear than we are to pray and why God is always ready to give more than we desire or deserve.

Yes, He desires much, much more for you than those matters that trouble you on earth. He desires the same for your neighbor and the enemy he commands you to love. He desires to give you everlasting joy in Christ and with Christ. He desires that thoughts of Christ’s return make you straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is drawing near (Luke 21:28).

How can this be your sure and certain hope? Do you merit a place in His eternal presence – welcomed to an endless Eastertide? Good heavens – no! You have been far too earth bound – far too focused on yourself – far too filled with anxieties – far too dull of heart and mind – far too unaware of holy things - to merit anything from Him. As have I.

But *This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven* did not come down in the flesh because you merited it! *This Jesus who will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven* came down because you need God’s gracious forgiveness and steadfast love. Him you now worship and adore in the highest way – seeking forgiveness of sins from Him (Apology 7/ Luke 7:50). Alleluia to the Savior! He has gained the victory! AMEN.