

Rev. Matthew Verseemann  
Trinity Lutheran Church  
Decatur, Illinois  
Ascension Day  
May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### **Celebrating The Ascension Of Jesus**

God's PEACE is ALWAYS YOURS in Jesus.

Hear the Word of God from Ephesians 1,

“God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, above all power and dominion, and above every title that can be given; not only in this present age, but also in the age to come. And God placed all things under His feet, and made Christ to be the Head over everything, for the church, which is His body.”

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

Today, we're going to celebrate the Ascension of Christ.

So, what is there to celebrate about Christ's Ascension? Christmas is clear enough: ***“Today, in the city of David, a Savior has been born for you.”*** That a reason to celebrate. Good Friday is also clear: ***“The blood of Jesus cleanses you from all sin.”*** That calls for celebrating. And finally, Easter Sunday is even more clear: ***“He is not here! He has risen!”*** And what Christ's resurrection means is: ***“He who believes in Me will live, even if he dies.”*** Talk about a reason to celebrate. But when it comes to Christ's Ascension back into heaven, what's there to celebrate? PLENTY!

Now, I will admit that on the surface there doesn't seem to be too much to celebrate when it comes to Christ's Ascension. In fact, Ascension Day doesn't even remotely appear on our culture's radar screen. You never hear of Ascension Day Parades. Nor are there any Ascension Day sales at the stores. I have heard a word this past week about: *"only four more shopping days until Ascension"*. And you can't even use this one as an excuse to skip church: *"Uh! Sorry Pastor, we can't make it to church this Sunday, we're going to visit Grandma for Ascension Day."* The pastor is not going to buy it. Let's face it. In comparison to Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter, the Ascension of Jesus doesn't seem to be a very big deal. But the Ascension of Jesus IS A VERY BIG DEAL, AND THAT'S WHAT WE'RE GOING TO SEE TODAY!

First of all, Christ's Ascension is the culmination of Jesus' work to save sinners. This is Jesus' ticker-tape parade, down the golden streets of heaven, in which the conquering Christ, Aslan the Lion, strides victoriously across the crystal sea, into the heavenly throne room, and takes up His place of honor at the right hand of God, the Father. The Glory which Jesus always had as the Almighty God in heaven, but which He laid aside to take on flesh and blood, so He could bleed and die to win our salvation, it is this Glory that He now takes up again, having won the victory of sin, death, and the devil for us! Jesus, the greatest of all war heroes, returns home victorious. This is His coronation day in which He is crowned again as King of kings, and Lord of lords, but He is now also crowned as Savior! That's why, upon His Ascension back into heaven, we're told in Revelation 5, that all of heaven exploded in singing, what we still sing in our worship services: ***"Worthy is the Lamb, Who WAS slain (past tense), to receive power and wealth, and wisdom and strength, and power and glory, and blessing!... for with Your blood You purchased people for God."*** Talk about a reason to celebrate!

Secondly, upon Jesus' Ascension, and His being seated at the right hand of God, Jesus is given the honor by His Father, of ruling over all creation. Why? Since He redeemed the whole creation by His death and resurrection. Ephesians 1 declares, ***"God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, above all power and dominion, and above every title that can be given; not only in this present age, but also in the age to come. And God placed all things under His feet, and made Christ to be the Head over everything, for the church, which is His body."*** In other words, it is the Lord Who saved us, Who now rules over us, and all things. Talk about a reason to celebrate. Page 2

Our sin is that we often forget, or are slow to believe, that our Savior – Who died to forgive us, and Rose Again to conquer our sin, death, and the devil – now rules over all things for our good: this includes the corona virus, the economy, and the totality of our not-so-normal lives. Sadly, we often give more credit to CNN or the CDC than we do to God’s Word that, as Psalm 3 promises us, ***“You, O Lord, are a shield around me...and from the Lord, comes my delivers!”*** When we go through trials, as we are, our fears magnify the danger, and our lack of faith, magnifies the enemy. But *‘looks can be deceiving’*. We assume that since the world *‘looks like it’s out-of-control, that it’s actually out-of-control.’* Nothing could be farther from the truth. No matter what the evidence looks like, Jesus re-centers us, ***“God placed (past tense) all things under Christ’s feet, and made Him (past tense) to be head over everything, for the church, which is His body.”*** Talk about a reason to stop hoarding, and start celebrating!

I love Luther’s explanation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, which says: ***“Thy Kingdom Come.”*** *What does this mean? “The Kingdom of God comes indeed, even without our prayers, but we pray in this petition that IT may come to us also.”* In other words, we don’t by our prayers put Jesus on the throne. He’s already reigning there quite nicely. Jesus is already King of kings, and Lord of lords, both over the believers, but also over all of the unbelievers – we so often fear. Our faith no more seats Jesus on the throne, than our unbelief unseats Him. The only danger with refusing to believe this is that you continue to live your life in the poverty of your fears, worries, and dread, while all the while you have a Savior ruling over all things for your eternal salvation; and also, that, in the end, you could, by your taking your eyes off of your King of kings Savior, be caught totally off guard when Jesus returns, as the Bible says, ***“to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.”***

A third reason to celebrate the Ascension of Jesus is that when Jesus entered the halls of heaven victoriously He cast the devil out of heaven once and for all. Up until Jesus’ death, resurrection, and Ascension, satan was still able to enter heaven, and come into the very presence of God, as our prosecuting attorney; to accuse us and condemn us for our sins. And at least many of his accusations were probably true, for, if you and I tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, we’ve all sinned grievously and repetitively. Romans 2, ***“There is no one who doeth good, and sinneth not.”*** And 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6, ***“Those who keep on sinning will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*** Our predicament could only be undone with pure blood. As I always say, ***“This was a war in which shed blood wins.”***

In Revelation 12 we're told exactly what happened when our great war hero, Jesus, returned home. It says, ***"And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels had to fight against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But they were not strong enough, and the devil, that ancient serpent, who leads the whole world astray was cast down to earth, and his angels with him. And then I heard a loud voice in heaven declare, "Now have come (present tense) the salvation and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ, for the accuser - who accuses the brethren day and night before God – has been hurled down, and we overcome him by the blood of the lamb."*** Talk about a reason to celebrate.

The fourth reason we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus is because Jesus, our defense attorney, is seated at the right hand of God, and pleading our case with His blood. Hebrews 9, ***"He (Jesus) did not enter the most holy place with the blood of bulls and goats, but He entered heaven itself, with His own blood, and there to intercede before God on our behalf."*** While Satan was accusing us, Jesus strode victoriously into the courtroom, with His wounds and His blood, to plead to God for our forgiveness. And God accepted His substitutionary death for our forgiveness, and He exonerated us of all our crimes, and dismissed the case against us. Furthermore, since Jesus' blood is a payment for all sins, of all time, and since Jesus forever intercedes to God with His blood on our behalf, the devil lost his case. And God kicked our accuser out of heaven, once, and for all! And although you and I still sin daily, God's Word says in Hebrews, ***"He (Jesus) lives to continually intercede to God, on our behalf, with His blood."*** In the end, the devil can accuse us of our sins all he wants, but he can't make His charges stick; because Jesus' blood is like a Teflon coating, or bullet proof vest, that causes all of the devil's charges – no matter how true they are – to fall right off of us because of the blood of the lamb. Talk about a reason to celebrate.

The fifth purpose of Jesus' Ascension into heaven is that He has re-entered the halls of heaven to prepare a place for us—a grand and eternal reunion in the paradise of God. Jesus said to the repentant and believing thief on the cross, ***"Today, you will be with Me in paradise."*** Not one day. Not some day. But ***"Today, you will be with Me, in nothing less than paradise!"*** The Greek word for 'paradise', means *"a Kingly estate, with lush gardens, and beautiful streams."* In John 14 Jesus said, ***"In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. And I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and take you to be with Me, so that where I am, you may be also."*** Page 4

Now, if it took the Lord only six days to create the whole universe (forget about that evolutionary blah! blah!) in its' "very good" pristine beauty; what will the splendor of our heavenly home be like, that Jesus has been preparing now for 2,000 years, for our homecoming? Talk about a reason to celebrate!

And last, but not least, upon Christ's Ascension, our Savior poured out His Holy Spirit upon His church on earth, and through the church upon the whole world. And the Spirit is the living, life-giving breath of God. Jesus couldn't pour the Spirit out with the full message of salvation, until the fullness of our salvation was completed. But now that our salvation is an accomplished fact, the Lord pours out His Holy Spirit, so that through the Spirit-filled Word, the Spirit-filled waters of Baptism, and the Spirit-filled Supper of Christ's body and blood, we receive life-giving CPR, from the Holy Spirit which is God's EMT, constantly attending to our needs, so that we inhale Jesus' forgiveness, through the means of grace, and then we exhale that forgiveness to the world. Think of it like this. The Lord purchased a billion bucks of forgiveness and salvation by His Good Friday death and Easter resurrection. And the Lord has buried this treasure of a billion bucks of forgiveness and salvation in everyone's back yard. But if this treasure remains buried, it wouldn't benefit us at all. If it remains buried, you and I would still go to hell with a billion bucks of forgiveness and salvation buried in the back yard of our lives. As a result, Jesus, as we'll celebrate next week, upon His Ascension into heaven now pours out His Holy Spirit to unearth the treasure, and comfort us with the treasure of the complete forgiveness of sins, and our victory over death and the grave that are already and completely ours' in Jesus Christ our crucified, risen, Ascended, reigning, and soon coming Savior. Talk about a reason to celebrate the Ascension of Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all human understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the one true faith, in Christ, our Savior, unto life everlasting. Amen.