

# ASCENSION SUNDAY

**May 28 2017**

Old Testament: II Kings 2:5-15

Epistle: Acts 1:1-11

Gospel: Luke 24:44-53

## ***Standing...***

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus Christ has entered into the unseen glory of His Heavenly Father,  
but that doesn't mean He's locked there—like He's in time-out.

Jesus ascends that He can come to us—here and now  
in Holy Baptism,  
in the Holy Gospel,  
in Holy Communion—  
delivering His gifts of life, salvation and the forgiveness of sins.  
He's closer to us now than He's ever been.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

## ***Sitting...***

I cannot express how much I enjoy following a Church Calendar.  
I didn't grow up with it,  
which meant that for me each Sunday looked the same,  
except Christmas and Easter.  
Yet without a Church Calendar to set those days in,  
Christmas and Easter were disconnected.  
Just floating out in the ether.

Now that I've been exposed to and learned to live by a Church Calendar—  
a liturgical cycle,  
there's no going back.

I realize it's an old hat for you...  
but let me bring you up to speed on what we've covered thus far.

The Festive half of the Church—the first half, is fast coming to a close.  
 We began the festive half with the Season of Advent—  
     recalling the promises of the Old Testament,  
     which spoke of the appearing of the Messiah.

Advent gave way to Christmas  
     during which we remember the descent of the Son of Man,  
     who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven  
     and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man.  
     Christmas was spent recalling how Christ took on flesh and blood—  
     taking upon Himself our human nature in order to redeem us—  
     to buy us back.

Advent spills over into Christmas and Christmas spills over into the Season of Epiphany,  
 where we saw how, as a Child, Jesus is paid homage by Wise Men.  
 We saw Him as a Boy in the Temple  
 and as a Man, John the Baptist points to Him saying,  
     “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).  
     We considered His baptism in the Jordan,  
     His miracles and heard Him teach.  
     And what became very obvious was His deity—  
     where He showed Himself to be God.

During Lent we journeyed to the cross—  
     through Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday,  
     where He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate.  
     He suffered and was buried,  
     and we rejoiced in His triumph at Easter  
     when on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day He rose again according to the Scriptures.  
     All of that was remembered and celebrated  
     during the first half of the Church Year.

But there's yet one more task yet to be accomplished before we can move into the  
 second half of the Church Year.

There's one more step in the work of our redemption—  
     And that of course is Jesus' Ascension, where we confess in the Creed,  
     He rose again according to the Scriptures and  
     ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.

Imagine if Jesus had not Ascended...

and He had gone on showing Himself as He did since His resurrection.  
What would we have to do to just see Him?

Most likely, we'd have to save up—flights to Israel aren't cheap.

And I hope each of you have comfortable shoes,  
because the lines to see Him are long.

If Jesus didn't ascend,

and we booked a flight

and we stood in line,

how much time would we get with Him?

Not much, that's for sure.

Some would only see Jesus

once in their life,

most never at all.

Thankfully, Jesus has chosen a different way to be present with us.

His ascension doesn't mean He's rejected us, or abandoned us.

It means He's present in a whole new way,  
all for you.

Luke records the account like this,

"Then He led them out as far as Bethany,  
and lifting up His hands He blessed them.

While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven."

Usually parting brings sorrow,

whether it's a friend who moves away

or a child who goes to college.

Good-byes are hard.

Farewells are difficult.

But the disciples...

they aren't sad.

No one sheds a tear—or gives a eulogy.

Instead, we learn that the disciples not only worship Jesus at His ascension,  
but they return to Jerusalem with great joy—

Joy is a strange reaction. But clearly, they understood something. They believed the promise that you've all heard from St. Matthew's account of the Ascension—the one where our Lord says,

*"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mt 28:20)*

The disciple's reaction of joy shows us that this was no typical parting.  
It wasn't "good-bye" at all.

So if Christ's ascension to the right hand of the Father wasn't a good-bye,  
then what is it?

Well, I suppose it matters quite a bit where the right hand of God is—  
because that's where He ascends.

See, if the right hand of God is some location up in the stratosphere,  
someplace far removed from us,  
then the Ascension of Christ does us little to no good,  
and it's certainly no cause for joy.

But—as Luther argued—if the right hand of God is wherever God is doing His work,  
then the Ascension is entirely for us, and full of good news!

Hear what is said in Acts chapter 5—

*"God exalted him at His right hand as Prince and Savior,  
to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." (Acts 5:31)*

The right hand of God is wherever God is doing His work—  
giving repentance and forgiving sins.

St. Paul says in Romans 8:

*"Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—  
who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." (Rom 8:34)*

Beloved, the right hand of God is not some distant,  
particular place. It's not far away.

It's where God is doing His work...  
wherever repentance and forgiveness is proclaimed  
in the name of Jesus Christ!

People say it all the time—God is everywhere—  
but God is not everywhere salvifically...bringing salvation.

That's where the right hand of God is.

Wherever God does His saving work through the forgiveness of sins—  
 whether that be at the font of Holy Baptism,  
 in the Bread and Cup of Holy Communion,  
 in the Gospel proclamation,  
 or in confession with Holy Absolution.

Jesus says to the very first pastors,

"Whoever hears you, hears Me."

And not only through the Pastor's lips,  
 but wherever His Word and truth are spoken.

So, if the Word and Truth are in the mouth of your spouse,  
 your parents,  
 even your children—there, Jesus is speaking.  
 That's the right hand of God gently at work on you.

So in the Ascension of Jesus He ceases to be present with the disciples in the old way  
 and begins to be present with them in this new way.

Sure, it's the only way any of us have ever known—

which will continue until He comes again in glory, or until we die.

This is why we do not gawk into the heavens looking for Christ.

Instead, we look by faith, where He's promised to be found:

in His Word and in His Sacraments.

Now, while I have you here, let me touch on one more thing.

In Acts we're told that a cloud lifts Him out of their sight.

But this is no ordinary cloud.

Throughout the Old Testament this cloud and God's presence are inextricably linked.

Think of it. What led the Israelites through the wilderness by day?

A pillar of smoke—a cloud.

What wrapped itself around Mt. Sinai at the giving of the covenant?

A cloud.

What enveloped the newly completed Tabernacle, and covered the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies? Take a wild guess...

This bright cloud is seen in Job, in Daniel, and in Isaiah...  
 Again, it's the guarantee of the presence of God.

This, by the way, is one of the reasons why the Church has historically used incense,  
 it's to mimic the cloud—reminding us that God indeed is here.

Jesus is now wrapped up in this same cloud—  
 It receives Him and then takes Him out of their sight.

So, connect the dots...

Just as God had been present to His people in the cloud,  
 God would now be present to His people in Jesus.  
 Jesus is now the guiding, guarding, pillar.  
 Jesus is now the new covenant  
     wherein God promises to be merciful to sinners.  
     Jesus is the Tabernacle.  
     He's the sacrifice,  
     the priest.  
     Jesus is the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies,  
     His blood poured there.

Jesus' Ascension means He's nearer than we think—  
 Drawing near to you,  
     just as in His earthly ministry He drew near to sinners.  
     He's always been this near to you whether you realize it or not.  
     He baptized you through the Pastor's hands.  
     And raised you in faith and still teaches you His Word—  
     who knows through how many teachers.  
     Every last sin of yours He washes away.  
     Your shame, He removes.  
     Your fears, He casts out.  
     You may think that you are lost but you are not.  
     You belong to Him and His family.  
     For you have been born of water and the Spirit.  
     You are a child of God, now and for all time.

What the Ascension means is that Jesus is with you in a whole new way.  
 So, when you hear His word, He's speaking to you.  
 When you receive His gifts, He's bestowing them on you.  
 Where the Word of God is faithfully preached

and the sacraments are rightly administered,  
there Jesus Himself is present,  
hidden to our eyes for sure,  
but accessible by faith.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

***Standing...***

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

***Offertory...***