

"The Ascension Is Still Relevant"

Text: Acts 1:4-11

May the Risen *and Ascended* Lord live forever in your heart as your closest friend and ally. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

As times change, many things in life cease to be relevant. Their importance diminishes, or disappears altogether. Changing technology, for example, routinely transforms yesterday's marvels into today's junk. Landfills are today the home of most 8-track and cassette tapes, floppy disks, and landline telephones. No one waits for film to be developed, or to be connected to the internet through a dial-up modem. Card catalogs, CD's and their bulky binders, slide projectors, paper maps (stuffed into your glove compartment) – all gone. All obsolete and irrelevant.

Things in life cease to be relevant when their usefulness comes to an end, when a better option is offered. It should therefore come as no great surprise that the prevailing attitude in society is that Christianity has also become irrelevant, since they believe that the Christian faith is not only obsolete, its usefulness has come to an end. In their judgment, something better is now available. Understand their logic here. The general idea is that human morality has evolved. Mankind is no longer unfairly moored by the restraints imposed by the God of the Bible. Since they view God's Word not as the message of freedom and life but as a book of rules and restraints, and since they believe that those outdated restraints have now been permanently severed, both the Bible and the Christian faith can safely be discarded. This has actually been Satan's goal since Bibles were returned to the masses through the Reformation. If he couldn't withhold God's Word from mankind, his only option was to make it seem outdated and irrelevant.

Apply this to the event we celebrate today – an increasingly neglected event in the Christian Church Year known as Ascension. The actual day of the Ascension was this past Thursday, and if that day passed without your notice, you can know that the problem is both real and personal.

This morning we seek to remedy that problem as we struggle to gain a better understanding of the meaning and promise, the therefore the *relevance*, of Jesus' Ascension – both for Jesus and for us – and thereby to be filled with comfort and eager expectation concerning this event. The text that will guide our study this morning is found in the First Chapter of the Book of Acts:

^{ESV} **Acts 1:4-11** *And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ ¶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*

So far the words of our God. Remember always that these are *God's* Words, not the words of fallible, sin-addled man. Eager to be instructed and uplifted by *God's own words* this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

Unlike Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter, we need to be reminded each year of the glory and benefit of the Ascension of Jesus. Why? Probably many reasons. We're busy, we're preoccupied, and we therefore have a finite limit to what can occupy our thoughts. Yet the best answer lies both in our own self-centeredness and in our natural impatience. First our self-centeredness. Ascension is actually not our holiday, is it? Not really. It belongs for the most part to our Lord Jesus. Consider it from Jesus' perspective. Where would *you* rather spend your time, in heaven or on earth? Wouldn't you be anxious to return to heaven to be with your Heavenly Father and to again exist in the perfect bliss of paradise – especially if you had previously resided in that unimaginably spectacular place?

Clearly. Who wouldn't want to be there right this minute? The Apostle Paul certainly agreed. In his Letter to the Philippians he said: "**If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.**" Philippians 1:22-23

Jesus obviously held the same sentiment. The Ascension was the day he got to go home – *victorious*! And what a home! The Ascension is therefore a unique holiday in that it is not all about us. The other holidays – mostly all about *us*. We find it easy to overlook Ascension because this festival, for the most part, was Jesus' great day as he returned to the glory and bliss of his Father's side in heaven.

Clearly then the Ascension is relevant if no other reason than for what it meant for our Savior. That's not to say, however, that there's nothing in it for you and me. The problem is that the Ascension holds mostly promise and potential for us – future benefits – and our impatience and inclination towards instant gratification work against us in this. Since we have little patience for the promise of even good things if those things lie in the distant future, we are perfectly content to let this holiday slide by unobserved. It is ironic that we have little trouble criticizing others for their obvious faults (like the disciples for their silly question to Jesus in our text about establishing a kingdom on earth) while we overlook our own. Here we find evidence that we can be just as selfish, silly, and near-sighted. Jesus surely did come to save sinners, didn't he?

The word the Bible uses to describe how these men were staring off into space is the same as it uses to describe how the Children of Israel stared at the glowing face of Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai, and how Stephen stared at the vision of angels when he was being stoned. Surely this event was absolutely amazing to those who witnessed it. Who knows how long the disciples stood there, or how long they would have stood there had not the two men dressed in white arrived. The angles asked the same question anyone walking up to a similar group today would ask, "*What are you looking at?*" "***Why do you stand looking into heaven?***" The angels obviously knew the answer, so with the question they offered an explanation, a promise, the great promise of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ: "***This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.***"

One aspect of Christ's ascension that solidifies its unending relevance is the absolute reality of this simple statement of truth from the angels. Jesus will one day return to this earth as he once left at his ascension. What a terrific, heart-lifting thought. Jesus is coming back – at any moment.

And he is coming back *for us*. Because he made us clean. In fact that's the whole point, isn't it? Jesus returned at his ascension to the Father, and he could only do so if he was victorious; that is, he could only reenter heaven if he had actually accomplished his Father's mission. The fact that he returned means he did what he came to do. He came to suffer hell in our

place. He came to save us from the eternal damnation which, because of our sins, we had rightly earned.

In fact the Ascension serves as the great "second proof" of Jesus' successful completion of his earthy mission to open heaven's doors to sinners like you and me. The first proof, of course, was his resurrection from the dead. You know well the test or proof that Jesus himself laid out for us: *If the tomb is empty on the third day, Jesus succeeded and victory is both his and ours. If he was still in the tomb after the third day, he failed – and our last best hope was also gone.*

The second great proof was the Ascension, which ought to hold the same place in the human heart as does the empty tomb of Easter Sunday. In fact every time that we see our Lord ascend back into heaven (through the eyes of the disciples) it should remind us that that very ascension is a declaration from God that the full debt for our sins has been paid by our Savior.

Clearly then the Ascension is still relevant. There is additional proof in our text. Focus next on the last words spoken to the disciples by the Savior: "***You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.***" The disciples had to be weaned from their Savior. They were lost without him until the Holy Spirit was sent on Pentecost - the event we plan to celebrate next Sunday. For reasons known only to God Himself, the Holy Spirit could not be sent until Christ had ascended to be with the Father in heaven - as the Savior himself said in John 16: "***I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.***"

This teaches us more about the relevance of the Ascension, for it is the ongoing promise of better things to come. The Ascension was a necessary step in the chain of events that would lead up to Pentecost. We sinful human beings were too slow and foolish to understand the truths of Scripture without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit could not come until Christ had ascended to the Father. Only after Pentecost, when the gift of understanding was given by the Spirit, did the disciples really comprehend what Jesus had been talking about for all those years. In his first sermon after Pentecost, Peter demonstrates a marvelous growth in his Christian understanding. Listen to his inspired words to the Pentecost crowd, and compare them to the rather foolish question the disciples asked Jesus at his ascension: "***Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to***

Israel?" After the outpouring the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter said, ***"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."*** Acts 2:32-33

Finally, do yourself yet one more favor as you commemorate the perpetual relevance of this great event: *See your Savior as he is now, in his heavenly home and seated at his Father's right hand in all majesty, power, and glory.*

Why is this so important? Why is this so beneficial and therefore relevant? Because *this* is our God. *This* is the Savior who will come again. *This* is the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth who even now speaks to the Father in our behalf. We do not now worship a weak, impotent, humbled God. Our God has power and ability beyond our human comprehension. We do not worship and glorify him because we think he needs it. We do so because he *deserves* it. Such a God can and will do whatever is best for us, a fact made all the more sure by knowing that he has already done the single greatest thing he could ever have done for us. He saved us.

All praise and thanks be to God the Son on this Ascension Sunday. Sing his praise and rejoice in the perfect, holy reunion of Father and Son in heaven. This is good and right for his thankful children. Yet in doing so, don't be selfish, and don't forget the last words that he spoke not only to his disciples then but to his disciples of every age and time: ***"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*** As we wait with eager anticipation for our glorified Lord to return, he gave us work to do – glorious, life-changing work. We are Christ's witnesses. Honor him now by spreading the good news that Jesus Christ is the Promised Messiah who came to earth, lived the perfect life for us, and died an innocent death in our place. Because of what Jesus has done, salvation is ours – free and complete. The debt of sin has been paid in full. Having completed his work, Jesus has now returned to the home *that will soon be ours.* Amen.

ESV **Ephesians 1:16-23** 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 a 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.

ESV **Luke 24:44-53** Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." ⁵⁰ ¶ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

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The Sunday after Ascension – May 16, 2021

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 212 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

(Ephesians 1:16-23) As is our custom, we commemorate our Lord's ascension on the Sunday following the actual day of the event, which was Thursday of this week. As part of our commemoration, we focus first of all on the blessing Paul communicated to the Church in Ephesus, and we do so because Paul here gives us a picture of Christ Jesus as He is now – risen, ascended, and glorified in heaven. We would do well to hold in our minds this picture of Jesus, for in such a glorified Savior we can certainly have absolute trust and confidence.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 2 (Page 30)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 24:44-53) The fact that Luke mentions the Ascension of Jesus only briefly should not influence our perception of the importance of this event. Jesus' ascension represents the moment of His final return to the Father's side. Though they did not fully understand, the fact that the disciples "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" after witnessing this event serves as a model for our ongoing reaction.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 738 (Brown Hymnal)

"Alleluia! Sing to Jesus"

The Sermon – Acts 1:4-11 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Ascension Is Still Relevant"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 216 (Red Hymnal)

"On Christ's Ascension I Now Build"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 212 (Verses 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (25) Average (32)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	(No Midweek Classes)	
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Luke Willitz, who recently completed the colloquy process and has been declared eligible for a call in the CLC, is considering the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Pastor Tom Naumann has returned the call to Redeemer of Cheyenne. Pastor Caleb Schaller has returned the call to Redeemer of Sister Lakes, MI. Pastor Chad Seybt has accepted the call to St. Paul's of Melrose, WI.

Church Council Meeting Notes – All members of the Council, plus the Pastor, attended the meeting on May 10. The Council discussed the Joint Statement, the disposition of which will be decided at the upcoming CLC Convention. Treasurer Mantz reported that our General Fund balance is again positive, although offerings fell slightly short of expenses in April. Several maintenance projects will need to be completed this summer. See Trustee Coordinator Brian Fettig for further information. The next Council meeting is scheduled for June 9th.

Confirmation Classes – Confirmation parents and students please see Pastor Roehl after the service this morning for the upcoming schedule.

Lutheran Spokesman and Daily Rest – Subscriptions for both the Lutheran Spokesman and Daily Rest need to be renewed. Please see the sheet on the mailbox table.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be out of town most of this week, leaving this afternoon and returning Thursday. Midweek Bible Study is in recess for the summer.