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The Seventh Sunday of Easter

The Ascension of Our Lord

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The Lord Has Ascended amid Shouts of Joy

Forty days after he rose from death, Jesus gathered his followers together and ascended to heaven. He left them with the assurance that his power would remain. He left them with a task to make disciples of all. He left them with a promise that he would be with them always to the end of the world. His power, his commission, and his promise remain ours today.

First Reading

Acts 1:1-11

Jesus prepared his disciples for his ascension into heaven.

Second Reading

Ephesians 1:18-23

Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.

Gospel

Luke 24:44-53

Jesus ascended into heaven.

Sermon

Ephesians 1:18-23

Introduction – The Christian religion, the religion you and I hold to, is based on a set of events that took place a long time ago. The events cover a period of time that lasted about 4,000 years and we can divide them into three parts: the story of the creation of the world and its destruction in the Great Flood. That part of the story tells us about Adam and Eve and Noah. Then there's the story of the nation of Israel; Abraham, Moses, and David are the critical characters. Finally, there is the story of the life of Jesus. All of these events are in the Bible. There's more to the Bible than history, but everything in the Bible is connected to these events in some way. What holds all of these events together is the story of Jesus. Everything written in the Bible before Jesus points ahead to him and everything written in the Bible after Jesus points back to him. Christians believe that Jesus is the center of the Scriptures.

That's why Christians know the events of the life of Jesus so well. We started learning pretty early. At first it was the Baby Jesus in the manger. In Sunday School we learned about the meaning of the cross, and we drew pictures of it to take home to our parents. As we grew older, we learned about Easter and doubting Thomas. There was John the Baptist who ate grasshoppers and the 12 disciples. We learned about the miracles: Jesus turned water into wine and stilled the storm. We heard the messages: I am the Bread of Life and I am the Good Shepherd. Most of the sermons we hear on Sunday mornings review one aspect of Jesus' life or another. And so today, even though we're a little late (the festival was actually this past Thursday), we're remembering Jesus' ascension into heaven. 40 days after Easter he gathered his followers near the town of Bethany and **he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.** And that's the last story we hear. 2,000 years have passed and we haven't seen Jesus and we've haven't heard him since he ascended.

You and I believe the stories about Jesus because the Holy Spirit has convinced us that the stories are true. We believe that his mother was a virgin and that he really turned water into wine. We believe that Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross to take our sins away and we believe that he came alive again on Easter. We believe everything the Bible tells us

about Jesus. But the stories are old; we've heard them before. Do you ever wonder why we don't have any new stories? Do you ever wish Jesus would host a TV special or create a website like www.JesusChrist.com? That he would just present some clue that he's still around and helping us out? Do you ever find yourself thinking about Jesus and wondering:

So What Has He Done for Us Lately?

St. Paul is going to answer that question this morning.

1. You all know that Jesus appointed St. Paul to be a missionary to Gentiles, non-Jews. So Paul travelled on the north side of the Mediterranean Sea and preached in dozens of cities. Sometimes he stayed in a place for a few days, sometimes he stayed for a while. Some people he never really got to know well; some he considered his dear friends. The Christians who lived in the city of Ephesus fell in that second category. So when he wrote to them late in his life while he was in prison, he was writing to people he really and truly cared about, not just as friends, but as Christian friends. He wrote—and you heard this in the readings this morning: **I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.** Paul wanted these Christians to be convinced without a doubt that Jesus was working on their behalf. And this is how he convinced them.

The power God displayed in you, Paul wrote, **is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.** Paul began with the facts. God accepted his Son's sacrifices for the sins of the world and provided the power for Jesus to walk out of his tomb alive. The time of humiliation was over: Jesus paid the price that needed to be paid. He still had the scars from the cross; he ate and drank as he had before. He was still a human being. But in the days after Easter Jesus was reclaiming the powers he had as the Son of God. And then he ascended and sat down at the Father's right hand, the position of authority. We use that term all the time: Jesus was the Father's right-hand man. Think of it like this: God the Father is the chairman of the board and Jesus is the CEO, the chief executive officer, who carries out the divine plan in the world.

It's important for us to remember that Jesus is still a human being. He understands what life is like for us down here. But now he has his full power as the Son of God. Paul wrote, **he is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.** At this very moment Jesus ranks above every angelic spirit in heaven and every human creature on earth. He will have this authority not only at the end of time, the age to come, but also in the present age—right now. People can put their confidence in anyone they want—a politician, a sports hero, a force in the universe, or an idol they think is god—but Jesus is more and Jesus is better. In fact, Jesus is most and Jesus is best.

So what has Jesus done for you lately? During every moment you sleep and in every moment you're awake, Jesus is in complete control. Jesus is in every dose of the Covid vaccine and he is in every body without the Covid vaccine. He is in every White House and every legislature. He knows every missile Israel fires at Hamas and every bomb Hamas fires back. Jesus is in every intensive care unit and every assisted living facility. He knows exactly how many immigrant children are separated from their parents on our side of the border. You and I have to stop worrying that the world is out of control. We have to stop wringing our hands that nobody is in charge. Just because Jesus doesn't solve problems the way we would doesn't mean Jesus doesn't solve problems—he solves problems his own way. Don't ever think that Jesus stopped working when he ascended into heaven. The events and the happenings may not be written in your Bibles, but the story is still being told.

2. And the story is being told for you and me. Paul wrote: **And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.** Sometimes you and I forget just how special we are to Jesus. We get ourselves into those dark funks and we start to think that we don't make much difference to Jesus. I'm just a weed in a big garden, just a grain of a sand on a wide beach. Being a Christian counts for nothing. I'm just a lonely little petunia in an onion patch. Shame on us for thinking that way. Later in this letter Paul calls us the bride and calls Jesus the bridegroom. Here he calls us the body and calls

Jesus the head. Come on. Does a bridegroom not care about his bride? Does a head not care about its body? That's silly talk. **We are the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.** We Christian are as important to Jesus as important can be.

It's for us that Jesus has all authority, power, and dominion. It's for us that his name is above every name. Paul solidifies that. **God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.** That's us along with people all over the world who put their faith in Jesus. **So what has Jesus done for you lately?** Listen: No one, no power on earth or in hell or in heaven can ever contend that you and I deserve to be condemned because of our sins. Paul wrote in another letter: **Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.** Jesus stands there with the nail holes in his hands and feet, the spear scar at his side, and the thorn marks in his head and he proclaims to the universe: **There is now no condemnation for those** who put their trust in me.

You've probably heard by now that Mark Zondag, our senior assistant, has accepted a divine call to serve as a missionary in Thailand. In a few months Mark and Sarah and Esther and Anastasia will take off on a 25-hour flight to Bangkok. There are 66 million people in Thailand and 95% of them are Buddhist. But Jesus will be on that plane and Jesus will be in that country with his authority, power, and dominion as the head of everything for the church. This coming Friday 27 other seniors will receive their first calls into ministry and wherever they go Jesus will be there with his authority, power, and dominion as the head of everything for the church. Tomorrow Mark and I will be at a conference learning what it would take to expand our campus ministry at Concordia, and Jesus will be there with his authority, power, and dominion as the head of everything for the church. As the weeks and months pass, we will continue to look for ways to witness to people living in our neighborhood, and Jesus will be there with his authority, power, and dominion as the head of everything for the church.

Last Thursday the Christian Church remembered that Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after Easter. Today we're celebrating that last event in Jesus' ministry on earth. **So what has Jesus done for us lately?** Does Jesus still speak to you in his Word to convince you to believe the impossible? Does Jesus still clothe your babies with his righteousness in Holy Baptism? Does Jesus still give you his body and blood in the Sacrament? And he does more. From his place at the right hand of God Jesus controls and governs every event that happens around us. And from the same place Jesus guides and guards us and all the people of his Church as we go and make disciples of all nations. Sounds like he's doing plenty, wouldn't you say? Amen.

Pastor James Tiefel