

# Ascension Sunday

May 24, 2020

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Hill Avenue Grace Lutheran Church

## Gospel: Luke 24:44-53

<sup>44</sup>[Jesus said to the eleven and those with 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, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

<sup>50</sup>Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. <sup>51</sup>While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup>And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; <sup>53</sup>and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

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You know, with Christmas and Easter being the biggest Christian festivals, and with Pentecost being right around the corner, the Feast of the Ascension is often overlooked by us Lutherans. But I believe that the Ascension of our Lord Jesus is something we should observe and celebrate every year. Without the Ascension of Jesus, the church wouldn't be able to continue the mission of proclaiming the good news in our world.

Think about it, while Jesus roamed the world as the divine human one, the power of God's love could only be witnessed through the actions of one person. But now that Jesus has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God, his power is available to all of us who follow Christ. This power, of course, is the Holy Spirit, and it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that Christ is able to abide in each of us.

Having Christ abide in us grounds us in God's love; nourishes our faith; renews us in the waters of baptism, forgives our sin, claims us as beloved children; and reminds us of the promise of resurrection. All of this not only enriches our lives each and every day, but it also frees us to continue the work of proclaiming the good news of Christ's death and resurrection in our world. Because we abide in loving relationship with Christ Jesus, God chooses to make us participants in the mission work of redemption and healing; in the mission work of proclaiming the forgiveness of sins.



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Sometimes I think it is easy to forget that God primarily acts in this world through us human beings. How many of us, when we pray for the healing of a loved one, for example, think about how God will work through various doctors, nurses, therapists, and counselors to help bring healing? Or, when we pray for God to feed the hungry, how many of us consider the fact that God calls us to help in that task by sharing the abundance we have been given? How many of us have recognized that the prayer to bring an end to the COVID-19 pandemic is being answered by those that choose to practice safe social distancing, those that choose to wear masks out in public, and churches who choose to remain closed until the science says it is safe. Of course, the prayer is also being answered by the doctors and nurses working day and night at the hospitals, and those in our local and state governments who are doing their best to protect us.

The point is we are the means by which God's power of love is revealed in this world. If we really want to end hunger, God frees us and calls us to feed people. If we really want equity and equality for all people, God frees us and calls us to strive for justice. If we really want to bring an end to violence and conflict, God frees us and calls us to walk in the ways of peace. If we really want reconciliation to happen; God frees us and calls us to repent and receive forgiveness, as well as God frees us and calls us to grant forgiveness.

And the good news of the Ascension is that we can indeed feel empowered to strive for these things because Christ, seated at the right hand of God, has the ability to be present with each one of us, giving us his love as our means to proclaim good news in our words and actions. The world will know the love of Christ through the work we do as God's beloved. Remember, the Holy Spirit ties us into relationship with Christ and Christ into relationship with us.

It is especially essential in this day and time that we remember the gift of Christ's ascension; because, I don't know about you right now, but I feel like I need to be reminded right now that Christ is present with me and giving me power to believe in God's love and act through it. I was disappointed to learn this past week about a letter signed by 1,200 pastors in California stating that they are planning on opening their churches up to public worship on May 31<sup>st</sup>. I was also disappointed to hear the President of the United States demand that all churches reopen for public worship immediately. It feels like there are many Christian brothers and sisters out there who have turned our church buildings into idols. After all, the church has never closed. Yes, we don't currently hold public worship, but our faith community has still been active through virtual worship, virtual midweek devotions, phone calls and video chats, as well as our Saturday food pantry. In reality, while our buildings may close, the church never closes.

But, with some Christians now demanding that they be allowed to worship in person again, we must be ever diligent in reminding people in our community and in our world that the God we serve, the God we follow, is the God of life. Thankfully, we have the power of the presence of Christ Jesus to remind us that every time we choose to continue practicing safe social distancing we are proclaiming God's love; that, every time we put on those face coverings in public we are proclaiming God's love; and, while it may be



difficult - for we all miss each other - by refraining from public worship until it is deemed safe to do so we are proclaiming what the church is all about—God’s love.

Because we have been given power from on high, thanks to the gift of Christ’s ascension, God is freeing us and calling us to be an alternative voice in our country—a voice of love, a voice of hope, a voice of promise. We are free to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in the midst of voices demanding that people’s lives be put at risk for the sake of regaining power and privilege. By doing so in our daily lives, the world will come to know the power of God’s love. So, how will you use your power to proclaim God’s love?

Amen.

