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The Ascension of Our Lord
May 14, 2015
Text: Psalm 47

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The three great events of our Lord's life which secure the salvation of the world are: his death on Calvary, His resurrection from the dead on Easter morning, and His ascension to the Father's right hand 40 days after Easter. Of these three, the Lord's ascension receives the least attention and is probably the least understood. I think it's a matter of timing for us moderns. The ascension always falls on a Thursday – a day we don't typically think of gathering for worship, in the beginning of Spring – when the days are finally longer and warmer; there's so much to do now that the long winter months are over.

But here we are nonetheless to celebrate the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the 40th day after Easter. Tonight, I want to use Psalm 47, the appointed psalm for the Ascension, as our guide in tonight's commemoration. You might grab your bulletin to follow along from time to time.

Psalm 47 begins with a call to celebration: "Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!" If nothing else, tonight's service should be an evening of celebration. The Ascension is cause for hand clapping and shouting. Because Jesus ascended to the right hand of God the Father almighty, we are filled with joy and worship and praise. This we do, when we sing our Alleluias with vigor and speak our Amens with bold conviction. One thing that impresses visitors to any congregation, whether the visitors are dyed in the wool Lutherans or virtual pagans with no knowledge of Christianity, is a congregation that sings and worships joyfully and dare I say, passionately! "Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!" Joy and worship is the order of the day!

That is, in fact, the reaction of the disciples in Luke 24:51–53, "While he (Jesus) blessed them, he departed from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the

temple blessing God.” I always find their reaction to Jesus’ ascension curious, maybe even odd. They’ve been with Jesus for over 3 years now, given up their livelihoods, disrupted their lives, all in order to follow Jesus. And when they see Him ascend into heaven so that He is no longer visibly present, they don’t respond with sorrow or tears. The apostles know something about the significance of what’s happening to Jesus and to them! It’s time for joy and worship not sorrow.

Return back to Psalm 47:5–8, “God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm! God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.” The time is for singing, joy, and worship because Jesus is ruling and reigning over the nations; the Son of God returns back to His throne to sit at His Father’s right hand. Jesus has gone up with a shout. He’s ascended into heaven from whence He came.

And the Lord returns in triumph, utterly victorious. For He has routed sin and Satan and death and evil. Tonight commemorates the Lord’s coronation as the king over all creation. God the Son sits on His Father’s throne, positioned at the Father’s right hand, a Biblical symbol or metaphor for power, authority, and majesty. And from there, from the Father’s right hand, He rules and reigns over all creation for the sake of His beloved Church.

Turn to Ephesians 1:19–23. This is a long prayer made by the apostle Paul and we’re kind of jumping into the middle of it. Paul is praying that the Church – believers, people like you and me – would recognize (vs. 19) “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power (the Father’s power) toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.” Stop there for a moment.

God exercises His immeasurable power toward us; that is, for our sakes! For our salvation and eternal benefit. Isn’t that amazing?! Maybe we should stop and clap and shout for joy!! Psalm 47 describes the “immeasurable greatness of God’s power toward us” like this in vs. 2–4, “For the Lord, the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth. He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet. He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves.”

Let’s continue with vs. 20. The Father worked His great might “in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand (the Father’s right hand) in the heavenly places.” Vs. 21–22 describes what the “Father’s right hand” means,

“...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. And he (the Father) put all things under his feet (Christ’s feet) and gave him as head over all things to the church.” This is one of the most amazing passages of Scripture. All of human history, all human power and authority, all the forces of the universe from the mysteries of the unseen world of quantum physics to the cosmic powers described by relativistic physics and everything in between, to profundities of life itself, all of it, everything is under the power and authority of the Lord Jesus who exercises and wields them for the eternal good of His Church.

Jesus is the “head over all things to the church.” Nothing escapes His careful attention and notice. All these things serve for the advancement of His kingdom. This same idea is described in the passage from Romans 8:28, “All things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.” And let’s clear up any misconceptions about the Ascension. Jesus remains with us and among according to both natures for He is the (vs. 22–23), “head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” The God-man, the ascended Jesus remains with us always, even unto the end of the ages.

Fear not dear saints of God. Clap your hands and shout to God with loud songs of joy! The Lord will work all the things that disturb us for our salvation according to His purposes.

Finally, one last promise attached to the Ascension. Psalm 47:9 says, “The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted.” The Lord gave Abraham a promise...that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham’s seed. That promise was fulfilled in Abraham’s greatest descendent: the Lord Jesus.

The saving Gospel of the Lord Jesus has gone out to all nations. Luke described it like this in 24:46, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” And what happened on the day of Pentecost? Jews from all nations heard the Gospel of Jesus. From there, it went to Samaria, then to the surrounding nations, all the way to Rome which was considered the center of the world in the 1st century. All the shields, referring to all the powers of the earth, belong to God; the ascended Son of God who sits at the Father’s right hand. He is highly exalted.

All of these things, and so much more, are what tonight it all about. It is truly a good thing that we gather together tonight in joy and worship to sing our songs of praise. May the ascended Jesus continue to rule graciously among us.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.