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Immanuel Lutheran Church – Burns, WY (dual parish service with St. John’s-Kimball)

The Ascension of Our Lord

May 25, 2017

Text: Luke 24:44–53<sup>1</sup>

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.

“God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet” (Psalm 47:5). So wrote the psalmist. And so we prayed at the beginning of the service. That prophetic psalm was fulfilled 40 days after the Lord’s resurrection. It was fulfilled when the Lord Jesus Christ “was carried up into heaven” (Lk. 24:51) to sit at the Father’s “right hand in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 1:20). Tonight’s service is a joyous commemoration of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, going up with a shout!

For 40 days, we have been rejoicing in the fact that Christ rose victoriously from the dead. In that victory, the entire world triumphs. All that Jesus did, He did for the salvation of the world. In Jesus’ perfect life, death, and resurrection, the sins of all men are erased; life and immortality are brought to light; God the Father is reconciled to the world; all the evil forces of sin, death, and Satan lay at Christ’s feet; and the condemning voice of the Law is silenced.

Only one thing remained for Christ to be the absolute, perfect Savior. Having defeated all enemies and secured eternal salvation for God’s people, Jesus had to be installed as the absolute Lord. He must ascend to throne of divine majesty and be crowned with heavenly glory. The psalmist prophesies just such a coronation in Psalm 45:6, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness.” Our Lord’s coronation took place through Christ’s ascension to the Father’s right hand.

To view and understand the Lord’s Ascension rightly, we must see the Lord Jesus as the substitute and forerunner of the whole human race. Jesus ascends to the Father’s right hand for us and for our salvation. Your present and eternal salvation rests upon

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon is a paraphrase and free adaptation of a sermon by C.F.W. Walther, published by CPH in *Gospel Sermons*, vol. 1, p. 276-283. Thanks be to God for our fathers in the faith.

our Lord's Ascension. Our God has gone up with a shout, in triumph and victory. And so we too, arise with the Lord Jesus in triumph and victory. The apostle Paul makes this salvific content explicitly clear in Ephesians 2:5–6, “even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” As we all are resurrected in Christ and justified by the Father in Christ, so we have also ascended with Jesus into heaven and become lords over all our enemies in Christ. As sin can no longer harm Jesus, no law condemn Him, no death terrify and rule over Him, so we too are freed from their tyrannies and translated into a heavenly life with Jesus. To be sure, this victorious life is hidden with Christ as Paul teaches in Colossians 3:1–3, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Hidden from human sight to be sure; but our victory is substantial and real, nonetheless.

This is why our joy and confidence in the Lord's Ascension is absolute and certain. The Lord Jesus Christ, the true Son of God and Virgin-born Son of Mary, sits at the Father's right hand for us. For each and every one of you. If sins trouble your conscience, look in faith to the Ascended Jesus and say, “Sin, you are conquered. The Lord Jesus took captivity captive. And I am trust in Him and His name was given to me in baptism.” If the condemning voice of Law speaks to trouble you, look, in faith, to Jesus sitting at the Father's right hand and say, “Law, your demands are fulfilled in my Lord. Because of Jesus, there is nothing you can say to condemn me. My Lord Jesus declares me righteous in His sight and you can say nothing contrariwise.” If death and hell seek to frighten you, turn to Jesus in faith and confidence and say, “Death, where is your victory? Where is your sting? Christ Jesus is my victory. My life is hidden in His undying life.”

Such is the joy and confidence our Lord's ascension gives to us. Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, rules and reigns over heaven and earth for the salvation of His people. And because He sits at the Father's right hand, His gracious presence in the Church continues unhindered.

It is commonly believed that after Christ's ascension, He is no longer present on earth according to His human nature. So when people say Jesus is here among us, they typically mean that Jesus is here only according to His divine nature. This is a false

understanding of the Ascension. And such an erroneous doctrine creates other erroneous teachings, particularly, regarding the Sacraments.

According to Scripture, Jesus is present among us according to His divine and human natures. His ascension was not like that of Enoch or Elijah who must reside in only one place in heaven. Not so. Jesus, true God and true man, has gone up with a shout to sit at the Father's right hand. And Scripture teaches that the Father's right hand refers to God's omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. Ephesians 2:20, 22 declares that God the Father seated Jesus at His right hand in order to put all things under Jesus' feet. From there, Jesus "fills all things." According to both natures, Jesus fills all things.

And so the living and ascended Lord, who fills all things, comes among us through His Word and Sacraments. The implications of what I just said are staggering. Paul connects the Lord's ascension to the Father's right hand with the on-going ministry of Christ's Church in Ephesians 4:10–14 (NKJV):

<sup>10</sup>He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, ... <sup>14</sup>that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting...

The God who went up into the highest heavens comes among us through His ministry committed to the preaching of His Word and the right administration of the Sacraments; they are the very means by which we know and experience all that Jesus accomplished for us. They are precious and dear to us, saints of God. Thus our cry should always be, "Give us God's pure Word in lectionary readings, Bible study, and sermon. Let us sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs that proclaim the love of God in Christ Jesus. Place the sacraments always before us. Never let our liturgy or prayers be corrupted by doctrines and trickery of men. For we desire the resurrected and ascended Jesus who promised to come among us."

Tonight, on this joyous occasion, let us all be awakened to faith in Christ and be strengthened in it through His glorious ascension. Yes, there will be many temptations and spiritual struggles in this life. But take heart. All power in heaven and on earth

was given to Jesus. Our God ascended with a shout of triumph and victory. His victory is ours. He will never let anything take you from Him. He's the Ascended Lord sitting at the Father's right hand, ruling and reigning for us and for our present and eternal good.

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.