

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our risen, and now ascended, Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

We had a very important and significant day in the Church last Thursday.

- It is always 40 days after Easter and it is always on a Thursday.

In the Church we celebrate Easter and Pentecost.

- They always fall on Sunday's.

We celebrate Christmas which can be on any day of the week.

- Perhaps the world and cultural traditions have helped that we have this as a day of celebration in God's House.
- But even at that, not all churches have a Christmas Day celebration.

But what about Ascension Day?

- Before coming here this morning, did you remember that last Thursday was Ascension Day?
- Did you celebrate it? Did you recognize it and give glory to God?
- Or, was it kind of forgotten—not such a big deal?

I wanted to get a little background on our celebration of Ascension Day here in the United States.

- As I researched it here is what I found.
- It was reported that.....
- It was one of the earliest church festivals celebrated by the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches.....
- But then it went on to say.....But most Protestants (that would be us) don't follow this tradition anymore. And even now, within the Roman Catholic church its observance and focus has lessened.

It does, however, remain a public holiday in.....

- France, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden, and a few other countries.

And go back even before all this to the Old Testament prophets.

- It was a day that they were looking forward to.

- The Church of the Old Testament really believed that Jesus' ascension was something that did not concern only Christ but all redeemed people.....
- Because it was the keystone, the brilliant crown of the entire work of redemption.
- We chanted some of those words this morning earlier in our selected Psalm for today. Psalm 49.
- I invite you later today to go back and look at those words again.
- Words proclaimed some 1000 years before the day of ascension of our Lord.

So.....the ascension of our Lord is a festival day in the Church.

- And it should be a big deal to us.

And so today, we address the question.....

- Why is Ascension Day so important? And what does it mean to us?
- As I was preparing for this message, there is so much to Ascension Day, that it was hard for me to focus it down and keep the sermon to a manageable timeframe.

First off.....Jesus' ascension into heaven completes His mission on earth and with this.....

- He does what He says.
- How important it is that this Jesus we literally put our life and trust in.....does what He says.

Unfortunately, we probably all know some big talkers who say things, promise things, and then don't follow through.

- You lose your ability to count on them.
- In fact, what they say begins losing meaning and value to you.

Our Jesus does exactly what He says and promises.

- Jesus on the night of His betrayal and arrest told His disciples.....
- John 14:1-3.
- Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.
- And now at Jesus' ascension, it all comes together and we see this take place.

Did you hear what He all said to the disciples....and us?

- He is going back to heaven.

- But also, to prepare a place for you.

And so we cling to this Christ. Our Christ.

CFW Walther said in an ascension day sermon he gave.....

- “If you don’t want to descend, cling to the ascended.”

We follow Jesus.

- We follow Him in our walking this earth in our pain and suffering.
- We follow Him to death and the grave.
- But we also follow Him in being resurrected from the dead.
- And we follow Him to our eternal home in heaven.

Christ has won the victory. Ascension Day puts the final stamp, and validation of this.

- We had become subject to the authority of sin.
- No human power was able to conquer it.
- However, Jesus undertook the astounding task of freeing us.

And what did He do?

- He took the sins of the world upon Himself.
- He permitted death to swallow Him up.

When Christ rose from the dead, the entire fallen world triumphed with Him.....

- The sins of all men were erased....
- Eternal righteousness won, hell destroyed, death disarmed, life and immortality brought to light, and deliverance by God the Father sealed to all men.
- All our enemies lay at the feet of Him who for us had entered the arena against them.

And only one thing remained if Christ should be our perfect Savior.

- After He had defeated all our enemies, He had to be installed as their absolute Lord.
- The scepter of omnipotence must be given Him.
- He must be crowned with heavenly glory.
- He must ascend the throne of divine majesty.

Dear fellow redeemed and saints of Hope.....

- If your sins worry you, you should not let them cause you to despair, but look in faith to the ascension of Christ.....
- And say, “Sin you are conquered. You will not conquer me anymore, but as my captive you should make me cling only the more firmly to my Savior.”
- My Jesus has ascended into heaven and I with Him, because I lay hold of Him with the hand of faith and am baptized in His name, I am free from you.

If the Law wants to condemn you, you should ignore its sentence and say.....

- Jesus Christ has fulfilled your demands.
- You have lost all your power to conquer me.
- Yes, Jesus Christ has now ascended to the highest throne and is now your Lord.
- I do not receive my sentence from you but from Him.....and it is grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

If death wants to frighten you, and hell open its jaws for you.....you do not have to fear.

- Through Christ’s ascension hell has now become an empty phantom.

Confidently we can and should mock them all and say.....

- “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is your victory? O death where is your sting? But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

And Christ intercedes for us and is now our advocate before the throne of God.

- Christ appears for us before God in the Most Holy Place.
- Just as Aaron, the high priest bore the names of the tribes of Israel on His breastplate when he entered the Most Holy Place, so also Christ carries the name of all believers on His heart when He appears before God as the true High Priest.
- There He unceasingly intercedes for us, rules for us, protects us, that the gates of hell cannot prevail against us.

And He sits at the Right Hand of God.

- Jesus has all power and authority and sits on the throne and reigns over all of creation.
- In this fallen, crazy, seemingly out of control world we live in, please remember that Christ sits on the throne.
- God our Father has validated and accepted Jesus’ sacrifice and payment for us and He now sees and rules over all things.

- Yes, He even rules this week over an elementary school and the tragedies there in Uvalde, Texas.
- He rules over all creation.

Think about this.

- A member of your family, your Brother, is sitting on Jesus' throne.
- When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden at the empty tomb on Easter morning He said to her.....
- "Go to My brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to My Father and Your Father, to My God and your God.'"
- John 20:17

And when Jesus ascended into heaven He told, He promised, us He would send the Holy Spirit.

- And, of course, He did.
- Jesus does what He says.
- Next week we celebrate Pentecost.

Jesus redeemed us and it is the Holy Spirit who brings us the blessings of redemption.

- The Holy Spirit creates, sustains, and increases our faith in Jesus.
- The Holy Spirit is shaping our lives into the glorious pattern of Christ.
- The Holy Spirit is directing us to focus on things unseen, not what is seen.

Now, some may say, why did Jesus have to ascend to heaven?

- To be sure, Jesus left the world in such a way that He no longer walks among us, like a human being; visible, touchable, and occupying space as He once did with His disciples.

But make no mistake, He is present. He is here. He is ruling.

- Far be it from us to believe that Christ is King in a kingdom from which He is separated and which He can rule only from a distance.

What was the last thing Jesus said to His disciples before He ascended into heaven?

- Matthew 28:18-20.
- Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

And as He did this, He raised His hands and blessed them.

- Jesus still has His hands stretched over you like a roof and He is still blessing you. And Christ is present here today. Present in a way that is also visible and can be taken in.

- In a few minutes we will take bread and wine and we will consecrate it.
- By God's Word it will become the very body and blood of Christ.
- Christ did not withdraw Himself from this congregation.
- He has rather come close to us.
- His grace. His help. His protection.

And so it is as we recognize Christ's ascension here this morning.

- If we recognize it as a happy ending to a fairy tale like story, we would consider it without its real value.

We must in faith gaze after the Ascended as our Redeemer.

- We must see ourselves triumphing in Him and make His whole work the foundation of our joyful faith.
- Then and only then do we enjoy the blessed fruit that it should bring us.

So then, this day, be awakened to faith in Christ and be strengthened in it through His glorious resurrection.

- And let none of us see Christ's ascension as no big deal.
- If you are a prisoner of sin, the Law, and death, and we cannot deny that we are, then Christ's ascension concerns you most intimately.
- Through His ascension Christ has taken your captivity captive.
- If you in death do not want to descend into the eternal prison, then in faith cling to the Ascended.
- You are then free even here, and someday you will follow Him into His glory.

Today is Memorial Day weekend.

- We remember those who have gone before us.
- Ascension Day should cause us to validate and emphasize the joy and bliss they now have.

And in the meantime, before your Savior brings you home into His Father's house.....

- If you experience misery, many temptations, and dangers of soul, do not give up.
- Cling to Him who today received the kingdom of His Father.

For your sake all power in heaven and on earth was given to Him.

- He will permit nothing to tear you from His hand and will be your shield and protection until He has placed you among those whom He has delivered.....
- Who sing an eternal hallelujah to Him in the temple of heaven.

To Him be honor and praise here and hereafter forever and ever. Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God, we now prepare our hearts and minds to say together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 158 in your hymnal.