

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR MAY 12 & 13, 2024**

He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He said to them, "This is what is written and so it must be: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ Look, I am sending you what my Father promised. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

⁵⁰ He led them out as far as the vicinity of Bethany. He lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ And while he was blessing them, he parted from them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² So they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God. Amen.
(Luke 24:44-53 EHV)

Let's begin by talking about what Ascension is not. It is not Christmas or Easter. There's no countdown of "only 4 shopping days left til Ascension." There are no parades/gifts/parties/ baskets/greeting cards/decorations. No one says, "Hey, let's all go to Grandma's for Ascension Day dinner." Compared to Christmas and Easter, Ascension is not a big deal. Not even remotely on the culture's radar screen, nor that of too many Christians. Need proof? What did you do last Thursday? On Ascension Day

But Ascension is a big deal. **ASCENSION MATTERS** for the Christian. In fact, it's right up there with Christmas and Easter. Christ was born/lived/died. Christ has risen. Now what? 40 days after the resurrection, he ascends into heaven.

Why? What is Ascension? What are the facts of it, what is the doctrine of Ascension? Ascension is the culmination of Christ's redeeming work. Easy to see why our culture/world don't think too highly of Ascension. If the Jesus we're talking about is the Jesus of the Da Vinci Code (just another human being, nothing special), well that's it. He's dead and gone. Nothing left but questions and conspiracy theories. And for us, a helpless, fearful, fatalistic, existence – as we wonder...when the Bible says, "**The wages of sin is death. The soul who sins is the one who will die,**" (Romans 6:23a & Ezekiel 18:20) we wonder just how bad will it be. If this is the Jesus acceptable to much of the world – great teacher, good guy, fine example – but that's it – then he just takes his place in long line of gurus and deep thinkers; Confucius, Muhammad, Buddha, Gandhi, Forrest Gump.

But there's more, so much more. From the lips of the risen Lord himself: "**These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.**" (v. 44) Everything Scripture said he would do, he has done! "**This is what is written...The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.**"(v. 46) Christ has died. Christ has risen. Death is now only the gateway to heaven, it's only a sleep, its bark is worse than its bite. After accomplishing nothing less than the redemption of the entire world – payment for the sin of the world the cross – for all people, past, present, and future – 40 days after this Jesus ascended into heaven.

Again the ascension is the culmination of Christ's saving work, sort of the big ticker tape parade down Main Street in which the conquering Christ takes his rightful place at the right hand of the Father while the hosts of heaven sing out, "**Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.**" (Revelation 5:12)

When Jesus left, but he didn't take the message of forgiveness and life with God with him. He left it here with us. We have it in his Word. And we have his command. "**Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be**

preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (v. 47) Ten days after the Ascension, the disciples received the outpouring of the Spirit's power on Pentecost. Most of us received this outpouring of the Spirit's power when the Word-filled waters of Baptism were splashed on our heads. We were converted to the faith/connected to Christ/drafted into God's army of witnesses.

Let's be honest. We're not always all that fired up about this. There are other things on our minds. How can I expend energy to share the Gospel when I'm weary/tired//exhausted just getting through the ups and downs of a normal day. Every day. You and I get frustrated, worried, anxious, downright afraid about things sometimes. Wouldn't it be better if Jesus were here right now, where we could see him/talk to him, instead of gone away, out there, somewhere?

Let's talk about where Jesus is right now. Ascension doesn't mean that Jesus has gone away the way we say when Grandpa dies – he's gone to a better place. Not here anymore at all. But there, and that's OK, that's wonderful for him. Before Jesus ascended, he promised that he will be with us wherever we are, wherever we go – all of us, all the time, everywhere. He can't do that if we could see him. If he were still visible in only one place at a time then we'd wonder where he'd show up next – yesterday in Israel, today in America, tomorrow in Thailand. But because he disappeared as he did, became invisible, he can be everywhere all at once. He is in fact, everywhere, at all the same time.

How did he do it? That's a silly question from earthbound, time-bound, imagination-limited simple minds. This is the God who created the universe, who was born of a virgin, performed miracle after miracle, died for the sins of the world, and rose again from the dead. This is the God who attaches his Word to water, wafer and wine, and salvation happens, forgiveness is given. But if you want to dig into the divine mechanics of this, look at the cloud that took Jesus out of the apostles' sight.

This is no ordinary cloud. We've seen this cloud before on the pages of Scripture. At the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus gave a glimpse of his glory. In the Old Testament, this cloud stood above the two angels on the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle, this is the cloud that led Israel through the wilderness on their journey to the promised land. Proof of God's presence. Always there, yet hidden.

Jesus didn't travel thousands of miles like a rocket into space. He rose up a little ways above the earth and a cloud – this cloud hid him from their sight. All that was gone was the sight of Jesus. The cloud means that he's no longer within our ordinary limits of time/space/gravity/3-D experience. He is beyond all that, is at the Father's right hand, which isn't so much a particular place as it is the exercise of the entire power of God, which is now in Jesus' capable hands. ***"God...raised (Christ) from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power, and dominion, and above every name that is given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. God also placed all things under his feet and made him head over everything for the church. The church is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."*** (Eph 1:20b-23)

Here's where the facts of Ascension, the doctrine of Ascension matters in our lives right now – So, he is gone...but here more than ever. He is with us even more powerfully than if he could be seen with our eyes. We live in the presence of our ascended, ever-present, all-powerful Lord. He is in control, in charge, working everything out for our good – everyone of us – wherever we are, wherever we go. There is no place we can go where Christ will not also be. There is no situation so complex or desperate or helpless that Christ can't work it out into something that benefits us. Ascension means we have his power, his presence, his promise.

Ascension matters because it offers so much assurance in a world devoid of certainty and safety. Ascension means that Christ will come again. That was the message of the angels in Luke's other ascension account in Acts 1: ***"This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*** (1:11b)

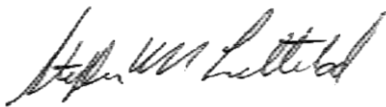
More Ascension assurance: a purpose for being here. In Acts: ***"You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth."*** (1:8) Here in Luke 24: ***"Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things"*** (vv. 47,48) Whether pupil, plumber,

preacher, police officer or pool cleaner all have the same ultimate purpose – to glorify God in all we think, say, and do and to be his witnesses where we live work and play.

We've already mentioned the reality and impact of Christ's constant presence with us. Even more than that, Jesus wants an ongoing relationship with us. Matthew records these words in his ascension account: **"Surely I am with you always until the end of the age"** (Matthew 28:20b)... to the end of time. Isn't it ironic that with all of our communication resources today – internet, email, cell phones, text messaging – those very things may be keeping us apart. Making a phone call a day or sending a dozen tweets a day or blogging or sending 30 emails/week or 1000 texts/month to someone does not make for a relationship. Facebook isn't face to face, even if you're using Zoom/FaceTime/webcam – it's not the same. Oh, you may be communicating in all these ways but you may not be cultivating meaningful relationships. What makes for a fulfilling, lasting relationships are things like time, commitment, sacrifice – all things Jesus has offered to us, and continues to do so.

Ascension may not be as flashy and dynamic and expensive as Christmas and Easter, but it matters. It may be an event with doctrinal implications that happened nearly 2000 years ago, but it still matters. Ascension is eminently practical, it has meaning right now today, and Monday, and Tuesday, and next year and ten years from now.

In the aftermath of the Ascension, notice what the disciples did. They didn't mope around and act depressed because Jesus was no longer physically, visually with them. **"They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They were continually in the temple courts, praising and blessing God.** (vv. 52,53) We do the same – worshipping, praising, witnessing at the temple/church, at home, at work – everywhere, all the time, knowing that Jesus is with us wherever we go, wherever we are. He may be gone, but he is here with us more than ever.



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