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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
May 24, 2020
Sunday after Ascension

Scripture Lessons: Acts 1:1-11; Luke 24:44-53

Hymns: 213; 738; 212:1,5-7 50:2,3 (344)

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

Sermon Text: Ephesians 1:16-23

“I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰ which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

²² And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, Our Risen and Ascended Lord, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man, ascended into heaven. --

When thinking of Jesus' ascension my thoughts are often centered more on Jesus as the Son of God returning to heaven, and less on the fact that Jesus as true Man, the Son of Mary, Jesus our brother has now ascended to the right hand of God. We dare not split Jesus into two separate identities since He possesses both the divine and the human natures in one person, but we do find ourselves focused on the one more than the other from time to time. I think this is one of those times when we may find ourselves failing to appreciate the presence of Jesus' human nature when considering this remarkable incident in the life of Christ.

Many churches have nearly forgotten Jesus' ascension since it is only rarely observed on its rightful day which was this past Thursday. Different messages are brought forward, and they may indeed be glorious messages of God's grace, but too many Christians have forgotten the ascension itself as one of the great events bringing us the comfort and assurance of the gospel.

There are many significant truths for us to recall in connection with Jesus' ascension. First, the return of God's Son to His Father in heaven signifies that His mission was successfully accomplished. Secondly, Jesus Himself taught that He was going to prepare a place for us in heaven, and that, thirdly, He would come again to receive us to Himself in heaven. Fourthly, the disciples were reminded, as we read already in our service, that Jesus' return would be like His ascension, physical, visible for all to see. Fifth, at His return Jesus will raise all the dead and judge the world! These are the facts but what does all this they mean for us? What difference does it make? Much in every way.

In our text the Holy Spirit presents us a lesson on --

THEME: The Impact of Jesus' Ascension.

Let us first consider --

I. The Spiritual Impact for Individual Believers.

Our text is in the form of a prayer the Apostle Paul held in his heart for the Christians in Ephesus. He was praying for the Lord to grant them the blessing of wisdom and understanding relating to the truth the Scriptures reveal, that we might know “the only true God and Jesus Christ whom *He* has sent.” (John 17:3) This prayer is a wonderful reminder for us that we don’t possess our faith in Jesus because we are smarter or wiser than other people in this world. By nature we too walked in spiritual darkness, and would not understand the glory of the gospel except for the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit opening our understanding that we might comprehend the Scriptures. (Luke 24:45)

Now we are getting to the point of why this text that actually doesn’t describe the events surrounding Jesus’ ascension into heaven is a great choice for our meditation on this Ascension Sunday. Listen to the how Paul describes the impact of the ascension for the believer.

Ephesians 1:18-20 “that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power²⁰ which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*.”

Do you know the hope of His calling? You have been called to faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. The hope of this calling is found in the inheritance that Christ has reserved for you. That inheritance is eternal life in heaven. Jesus’ ascension makes this hope a reality for us. Jesus’ ascension makes it possible for us to hold in our hearts the conviction that we do have peace with God in spite of our sin. Paul is reminding us in this prayer that God brought His own great power to bear determining the outcome of our faith. He did this first by raising Jesus from the dead, and then by exalting Jesus through His ascension to that position of power and influence at the right hand of God the Father.

This is a position that the Son of God would have held from all eternity, but not Jesus. Not Jesus because Jesus is also the Son of Man who was born of the Virgin Mary and as our Brother suffered for us and died in our place to redeem us from death and hell. It

was this Jesus, who is both true God and true Man, who was raised from the dead and ascended to His Father, to our God and His God in heaven above. This Jesus now makes intercession for us before the throne of God. The influence of the almighty Son of God, the influence of that Man whose name is above every name, it is used for your benefit and mine. Jesus intercedes for us to maintain peace with God. He understands what it means to be human. One might say, “Of course He does! As the Son of God He knows all things.” However, He knows this by experience! He sympathizes with us in our weakness because Jesus to this day and forevermore is fully human and “*was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.*” (Hebrews 4:15) He is looking out for you! He cares for **you!** He understands **you!** He is **there** at the right hand of God for **you!**

That is the impact of Jesus’ ascension as it relates to the individual Christian who is struggling through this valley of sorrows. We are walking a pilgrimage that has along its path sickness and sorrow and temptation, along with the joys of salvation that come to us through faith in Christ Jesus. Through it all we have hope for that rich and glorious inheritance of eternal life in the presence of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. *God used His incomparable power to raise Jesus from the dead and have Jesus ascend to His right hand, all to bring us these blessings of salvation.*

The impact of Jesus’ Ascension extends far beyond the individual Christian. As we continue to consider the words of Paul’s prayer for the Church in Ephesus the Spirit reveals –

II. The Overwhelming Impact of Jesus’ Ascension for His Church and Its Mission.

Ephesians 1:20-23 (God) seated *Him* (Jesus) at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

²² And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

There are so many powers in this world. There are government powers with different heads of state, some elected democratically, others are dictators who rule as tyrants. Of course the super wealthy of this world wield great power as well. Some would propose that the heads of industry and the world of finance are the real powers behind most governments. For many of the rich and powerful their power is not always exercised for good, and it goes to their heads. They see themselves as being so great and powerful they cannot be denied any desire they may have. And so the expression goes, “Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” That is the world we live in, a world corrupted by sin and evil desires. To many it appears that the powers of this world, the powers of evil are in control, and the church of Christ is at the world’s mercy.

Jesus’ ascension reveals that the exact opposite is true. Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God and is FAR above every principality and power that can be named. This exalted position to which He has ascended is permanent. Jesus is above all others for time and on into eternity, in this world **and** in that which is to come. His power is exercised for the Church. Since our view of things happening in the world is so limited, we can’t see all that is going on in the world and we can’t see past today. We fail to appreciate that the Lord Jesus is in control and directing all things for the good of His Church, for the advancement of His Kingdom, for the salvation of souls.

Jesus’ power is incorruptible. It is always for our good and blessings, for the advancement of the gospel! The powers of this world have been vanquished. They are under His feet. They are subdued! They are powerless before Jesus. Just before His ascension into heaven Jesus told His disciples; “*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*”¹⁹ *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.*” (Matthew 28:18-19) The power and the dominion belongs to Jesus our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord! The Church may go forward confidently in its mission of making disciples of all the nations.

Because Jesus is our Redeemer who was “*obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,*

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:8-11)

Jesus is in charge. Even when we think the world is running amok, Jesus has things under His control. Even in times of a pandemic, Jesus can and does turn all things for the welfare of His Church, for the advancement of His gospel. Right now we may feel frustrated that we can't gather at church to hear the Word, and to raise our voices together to sing our Redeemer's praises. Jesus is still in charge! He will turn this for good for the Church. The gospel is going forth, streaming over the internet from our congregation and many others as well. It can be seen and heard around the globe! That is good! And so Jesus blesses His Church! As for us, perhaps those of us that have taken coming to church, assembling with our brothers and sisters in Christ for granted and have neglected it, perhaps we have a renewed desire to be faithful in hearing the Word and encouraging one another with our presence. May the Lord grant that blessing to us all very soon!

There are many ways in which Jesus can and does, and will continue to use His superior power and authority for us.

Jesus' ascension is often seen as a culminating event in the life of Christ. Indeed it does convey the message of a mission accomplished. Jesus' mission on earth of securing our redemption was successfully completed, and so He ascended on high to the right hand of God the Father! However that is not the end of Jesus' work on our behalf. Jesus' ascension has a continuing impact upon the life of each and every believer as we walk the road to heaven. He continually uses His influence before the throne of God on our behalf! Jesus' ascension also has an overwhelming impact for His Church on earth. Jesus' power, might and dominion overwhelms any and all who would hinder the advancement of the gospel or let His kingdom come! His will is done on earth even as it is in heaven!

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)