

"The Second Proof"

Text: Acts 1:4-11

May the Risen *and Ascended* Lord live forever in your heart as your closest friend and ally. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

To say that I am opposed to the lottery is something akin to a lamb saying that he is "anti-wolf." One word sums up the whole sordid mess that is gambling: "Loser." The point is that if you play and don't win, you lose; but if you play and win, you lose even more. In fact just playing tends to foster the notion that "something for nothing" is good, as opposed to good, honest work and eating the God-given fruit of your labors.

The point here is not that I am encouraging you in the strongest of terms to avoid the lottery like lambs avoid wolves (I am) it is rather to point out an interesting anomaly in those that are awarded some sort of payment – which in turn teaches us something about ourselves. Most human beings tend to be nearsighted. We are long on instant gratification and short on trust, and we tend to make decisions accordingly. So also it is interesting to hear that the vast majority of those who win big lottery jackpots choose to take a much smaller instant, lump-sum payment up front, rather than opt for annual payments that always add up to substantially more money. Apparently it is better to blow the money up front and all at once, rather than stretch it out over many years.

Apply this to the event we celebrate today – a somewhat neglected event in the Christian Church Year known as Ascension. (The actual day of the Ascension was this past Thursday). What we will uncover in our study of Christ's Ascension is not only selfishness on the part of us sinners, but also a profound lack of appreciation for the great things that lie ahead. The Church's celebration of the Ascension is almost non-existent, no doubt due in large part to the fact that Christ's Ascension is mostly about *future* promises – good things that lie somewhere in the distant future. Add to that the fact that we tend to be more subdued in our celebration of the good things that happen to others, and it's not hard to see why the Ascension passes mostly unnoticed.

This morning we seek to remedy that problem as we struggle to gain a better understanding of the meaning and promise of Jesus' Ascension – for Jesus and for us – and thereby to be filled with comfort and eager expectation concerning this event. Our study of God's Word this morning is centered around the theme: "*The Second Proof.*"

The text that will guide our study this morning is found in the First Chapter of the Book of Acts:

^{ESV} **Acts 1:4-11** *And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ ¶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*

So far the words of our God. Bear in mind that these are God's Words, not the words of fallible man. Eager to be instructed and uplifted by God's own words this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

Unlike Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter, we need to be reminded each year of the glory and benefit of the Ascension of Jesus. Why is that? The answer lies both in our own self-centeredness and in our natural impatience. First our self-centeredness. Ascension is actually not our holiday, is it? Not really. It belongs, for the most part, to our Lord Jesus. Think of it. If you were Christ Jesus, where would *you* rather spend your time, in heaven or on earth? Wouldn't you be anxious to return to heaven to be with your Heavenly Father and exist in the perfect bliss of paradise – especially if you had once known what that place was really like?

Clearly. Who wouldn't want to be there right this minute? The Apostle Paul certainly agreed. In his Letter to the Philippians he said: "**If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.**" Philippians 1:22-23

Jesus obviously held the same sentiment. The Ascension was the day he got to go home – *victorious*! And what a home! The Ascension is therefore a unique holiday in that it is not all about us. The other holidays – again, mostly all about *us*. We find it easy to overlook Ascension because this festival, for the most part, was Jesus' great day as he returned to the glory and bliss of his Father's side in heaven.

Clearly then the Ascension is worthy of our focus and attention because of what it meant for our Savior. That's not to say, however, that there's nothing in it for you and me. The problem is that the Ascension holds mostly promise and potential for us, and that's where our impatience and inclination towards instant gratification work against us. Since we have little patience for the promise of even good things if those things lie in the distant future, we are perfectly content to let this holiday slide by unobserved. It is ironic that we have little trouble criticizing others for their obvious faults (even Jesus' disciples). Here we find evidence that we can be just as cold, just as self-centered, and just as impatient as the worst of them. Jesus surely did come to save sinners, didn't he?

The word the Bible uses to describe how these men were staring off into space is the same as it uses to describe how the Children of Israel stared at the glowing face of Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai, and how Stephen stared at the vision of angels when he was being stoned. Surely this event was absolutely amazing to those who witnessed it. Who knows how long the disciples stood there, or how long they would have stood there had not the two men dressed in white arrived. The angles asked the same question anyone walking up to a similar group today would ask, "*What are you looking at?*" "***Why do you stand looking into heaven?***" The angels obviously knew the answer, so with the question they offered an explanation - a promise – the great promise of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ: "***This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.***"

Stop for a moment this morning and contemplate the absolute reality of that simple statement of truth from the angels. Jesus will one day return to this earth as he once left at his ascension. What a terrific, heart-lifting thought. Jesus is coming back – at any moment.

And he is coming back for us. Because he made us clean. In fact that's the whole point, isn't it? Jesus returned at his ascension to the Father, and he could only do so if he was victorious; that is, he could only return to his Father if he had actually accomplished his Father's mission. The fact that he returned means he did what he came to do. What did he come to do?

He came to suffer hell in our place. He came to save us from the eternal damnation which, because of our sins, we had rightly earned.

In fact that is how and why the Ascension serves as the great "second proof" of Jesus' successful completion of his earthy mission to open heaven's doors to sinners like you and me. The first proof, of course, was his resurrection from the dead. You know well the test or proof that Jesus himself laid out for us: *If the tomb is empty on the third day, he succeeded and victory is both his and ours. If he was still in the tomb after the third day, he failed – and our last best hope was also gone.*

The second great proof was the Ascension, which ought to hold the same place in the human heart as does the empty tomb of Easter Sunday. In fact every time that we see our Lord ascend back into heaven (through the eyes of the disciples) we ought to remind ourselves of the fact that that very ascension is a declaration from God that the full debt for our sins has been paid by our Savior.

This is the first part of the "*What's in it for us?*" Yet we also want to note the last words spoken to the disciples by the Savior to learn more of "*What's in it for us?*" "***You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.***" The disciples had to be weaned from their Savior. They were lost without him until the Holy Spirit was sent on Pentecost - the event we celebrate next Sunday. For reasons known only to God Himself, the Holy Spirit could not be sent until Christ had ascended to be with the Father in heaven - as the Savior himself said in John 16: "***I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.***"

This teaches us more of "*what's in it for us*" when it comes to the Ascension, for it is the ongoing promise of better things to come. The Ascension was a necessary step in the chain of events that would lead up to Pentecost. We sinful human beings were too slow and foolish to understand the truths of Scripture without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit could not come until Christ had ascended to the Father. Only after Pentecost, when the gift of understanding was given by the Spirit, did the disciples really comprehend what Jesus had been talking about for all those years. In his first sermon after Pentecost, Peter demonstrates a marvelous growth in his Christian understanding. Listen to his inspired words to the Pentecost crowd, and compare them to the rather foolish question the disciples asked Jesus at his ascension: "***Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to***

Israel?" At Pentecost Peter said, **"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."** Acts 2:32-33

Finally, do yourself yet one more favor as you commemorate this great event: *See our Savior as he is now, in his heavenly home and seated at his Father's right hand in all majesty, power, and glory.*

Why is this so important? Why is this so beneficial? Because *this* is our God. *This* is the Savior who will come again. *This* is the all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth who even now speaks to the Father in our behalf. We do not now worship a weak, impotent, humbled God. Our God has power and ability beyond our human comprehension. We do not worship and glorify him because we think he needs it; we do so because he *deserves* it. Such a God can and will do whatever is best for us, a fact made all the more sure by knowing that he has already done the single greatest thing he could ever have done for us. He saved us.

All praise and thanks be to God the Son on this Ascension Sunday. Sing his praise and rejoice in the perfect, holy reunion of Father and Son in heaven. This is good and right for his thankful children to do. Yet in doing so, don't be selfish, and don't forget the last words that he spoke not only to his disciples then but to his disciples of every age and time: **"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** As we wait with eager anticipation for our glorified Lord to return, he gave us work to do – glorious, life-changing work. We are Christ's witnesses. Honor him now by spreading the good news that Jesus Christ is the Promised Messiah who came to earth, lived the perfect life for us, and died an innocent death in our place. Because of what Jesus has done, salvation is ours – free and complete. The debt of sin has been paid in full. Until he returns, tell it – like it is. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV Ephesians 1:16-23 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that 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 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. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

ESV Luke 24:44-53 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." ⁵⁰ ¶ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

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The Sunday after Ascension – May 17, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn - 212 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Ephesians 1:16-23) As we commemorate our Lord's ascension, we focus first of all on the blessing Paul wrote to the Church in Ephesus. We do so because Paul here gives us a picture of Christ Jesus as He is now – risen, ascended, and glorified in heaven. We would do well to bear in mind this picture of Jesus, for in such a glorified Savior we can certainly have great trust and confidence.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 2 (Page 30)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 24:44-53) The fact that Luke mentions the Ascension of Jesus only briefly should not influence our perception of the importance of this event. Jesus' ascension represents the moment of His final return to the Father's side. Its significance for Christians did not escape the disciples, who returned to Jerusalem with great joy after witnessing the event.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 738 (Brown Hymnal)

"Alleluia! Sing to Jesus"

The Sermon – Text: Acts 1:4-11 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Second Proof"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -216 (Red Hymnal)

"On Christ's Ascension I Now Build"

The Offering

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -212 (Verses 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Last Sunday (49) Average (50)

This Week at St. Paul:

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| Today | -9:00 a.m. | – Sunday School and Bible Class |
| | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | – Coffee/Fellowship Time |
| Wednesday | -7:00 p.m. | – Midweek Bible Study |
| Next Sunday | -10:00 a.m. | – Sunday Worship w/Communion |
| | -11:15 a.m. | – Coffee/Fellowship Time |

CLC News – Pastor Paul Krause has accepted the calls to Trinity of Watertown and Zion of Hidewood, SD. Teacher Quinn Sprengeler is considering the call to Gethsemane of Spokane, WA.

Summer Schedule – Beginning next Sunday we transition into our summer schedule, which means that Sunday School and Bible Class are in recess until Labor Day. Please remember that such church functions are meant to supplement family devotions and personal Bible study, which of course are to continue year round.

Nepal Aid – The needs of our brothers and sisters in Nepal is still great. Please don't forget to include them in your prayers. If you would like to send aid, you can do so online here:

<http://lutheranmissions.org/earthquake>.

VBS Scheduling – Parents with VBS-aged children are asked to meet with the Pastor this morning to try to schedule this summer's Vacation Bible School. As always, we would like to try to find a Friday-Saturday that will work for all schedules.

Church Project – All that remains to finish up last year's retaining wall project is to rework part of the sprinkler system in that area. Please speak to Trustee Coordinator Brian Fettig if you could help with some shovel work during the week.