

"The Ascension Is Still Relevant"

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:

As times change, many things in life cease to be relevant. Their importance diminishes, or disappears altogether. Changing technology, for example, routinely transforms yesterday's marvels into today's junk. Landfills are today the home of most 8-track and cassette tapes, floppy disks, and landline telephones. No one waits for film to be developed, or to be connected to the internet through a dial-up modem. Card catalogs, CD's and their bulky binders, slide projectors, paper maps (stuffed into your glove compartment) – all gone. All obsolete and irrelevant.

Things in life cease to be relevant when their usefulness comes to an end, or when a better option is offered. It should therefore come as no great surprise that the prevailing attitude in society is that Christianity has also become irrelevant, since the godless believe that the Christian faith is not only obsolete, its usefulness has come to an end. In their judgment, something better is now available. Understand their logic here. The general idea is that human morality has evolved. Mankind is no longer unfairly moored by the restraints imposed by the God of the Bible. Since they view God's Word not as the message of freedom and life but as a book of rules and restraints, and since they believe that those outdated restraints have now been permanently severed, both the Bible and the Christian faith can safely be discarded. This has actually been Satan's goal since Bibles were returned to the masses through the Reformation. If he couldn't withhold God's Word from mankind, his only option was to make it seem outdated, pointless, and irrelevant.

Apply this to the event we celebrate today – an increasingly neglected event in the Christian Church Year known as Ascension. The actual day of the Ascension was this past Thursday, and if that day passed without your notice, you can know that the problem is both real and personal.

This morning we seek to remedy that problem as we struggle to gain a better understanding of the meaning and promise, the therefore the *relevance*, of Jesus' Ascension – both for Jesus and for us – and thereby to be filled with comfort and eager expectation as a direct result of this event. 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."*

This is God's Word. Remember always that these are *God's Words*, not the words of fallible, sin-addled 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? Probably many reasons. We're busy, we're preoccupied, and we therefore have a finite limit to what can occupy our thoughts. Yet the best 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. Not primarily. It belongs for the most part to our Lord Jesus. Consider it from Jesus' perspective. 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 to again exist in the perfect bliss of paradise – especially if you had previously resided in that unimaginably spectacular place?

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

It's hard to imagine that Jesus, according to his human nature, would disagree. 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? Mostly all about *us*. We find it easy to overlook Ascension because this festival, for the most part, was Jesus' great day as his local, visible presence left this sin-broken world and he returned to the glory and bliss of his Father's side in heaven. Remember what Jesus himself said about his ascension: ***"You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I."***^{ESV}(John 14:28)

Clearly then the Ascension is relevant if no other reason than for 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 – future benefits – and our impatience and inclination towards instant gratification work against us in this. 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 pass by unobserved. It is ironic that we have little trouble criticizing others for their obvious faults (like the disciples for their silly question to Jesus in our text about establishing a kingdom on earth) while we overlook our own painfully obvious deficiencies. Here we find evidence that we can be just as selfish, silly, and near-sighted. Jesus truly did come to save sinners, didn't he?

The word the Bible uses in our text to describe how the men who witnessed Jesus' ascension were staring off into space is the same word 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. Clearly the ascension was absolutely amazing to those who witnessed it. Who knows how long the disciples stood there, or how long they would have continued to stare in wonder into the sky 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 and a promise – the great promise of the ascension of our Lord Jesus: ***"This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."***

One aspect of Christ's ascension that solidifies its unending relevance is the absolute reality of this 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 reenter heaven if he had actually accomplished his Father's mission. The fact that he returned means he did what he came 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 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, Jesus 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 is 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. Every time that we see our Lord ascend back into heaven (through the eyes of the disciples) it should remind us that that very ascension is a declaration from God that the full debt for our sins has been paid by our Savior.

Clearly then the Ascension is still relevant, and there is yet more proof in our text. Focus next on the last words spoken to the disciples by the Savior: ***"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 plan to 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 about the relevance of 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 fully 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 the previous three years. In his first sermon after Pentecost, Peter demonstrates incredible 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?"** After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit 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 the perpetual relevance of this great event: *See your 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 and therefore relevant? 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 on 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 paid our sin debt and thereby saved us from eternal torment in hell.

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. 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 believers 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, forgiveness is ours – free and complete. The debt of sin has been paid in full. Having completed his work, Jesus has now returned to the home *that will soon be ours.* Amen.

ESV (**Ephesians 4:7-16**) But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

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.

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."



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The Sunday after Ascension – May 12, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 212 (Stanzas 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 Epistle Lesson: (Ephesians 4:7-16) As is our custom, we commemorate our Lord's ascension on the Sunday following the actual day of the event, which was Thursday of this week. As part of our commemoration, we focus first on the blessing Paul communicated to the Church in Ephesus, and 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 hold in our minds this picture of Jesus, for in such a glorified Savior we can certainly have absolute trust and confidence.

Psalm 2 (Supplement page 30) (Brown Hymnal)

The Gospel 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, we are told, returned to Jerusalem with great joy after witnessing the event.

The Confession of Faith -

Nicene Creed – (Supplement page 5)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 216 (Red Hymnal)

"On Christ's Ascension I Now Build"

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

"The Ascension Is Still Relevant"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 738 (Brown Hymnal)

"Alleluia! Sing to Jesus"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 212 (Stanzas 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (37) Average (42)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor David Ude is considering the calls to Grace of Sleepy Eye and Faith of New Ulm. Teacher Neil Bernthal has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Teacher Ross Kok is considering the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac. Teacher Matthew Kranz has accepted the call to Berea of Inver Grove Heights.

Church Council Notes – All six Council members, plus the Pastor, were present for the meeting on May 6th. Offerings for March were below budgeted need by \$132. Expenses were also higher than budgeted, increasing our year-to-date deficit to \$1,428. In addition to Pastor Roehl, Mark and Mick Johnson have agreed to represent St Paul at the WC Delegate Conference in Valentine in May. Next Council meeting is scheduled for June 12th at 6pm.

Looking Ahead – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend meetings, ILC graduation, and a family reunion next weekend. A lay service is planned in his absence. There will therefore be Sunday school on May 19th (the final class before summer recess) but no Bible Class. Next Wednesday, May 15th, will be the last midweek Bible study prior to the summer recess.