

**Ascension Day (Observed): May 28, 2017**  
**“Gone to Fill All Promises”**

Alleluia! Christ is ascended! He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!

When a dear one is separated from us, we hurt, we grieve, we sorrow. School being over, many children sadly say goodbye to teachers and friends that they may not see for another few months. This weekend our country observes Memorial day, and we think of loved ones gone; we give thanks and remember those who gave their lives in service to our country. As they are gone from our sight, they are not gone from our memory.

It is also on this day that we in the church today observe the Feast of Ascension; the day when Jesus visibly was lifted up in front of the Apostles and a cloud took Him out of their sight. For the church this is not a day of sadness; it is a day of triumph. It is a feast of victory for our Christ. He left the Father’s throne. He humbled Himself to be born of a virgin. He was laid in a crude manger in a common stable. As a young child, He had to flee to Egypt and back again to Nazareth. As a man, He traveled throughout the Jewish land in exhaustion, being tempted, and suffering all sorts of physical, mental, and emotional anguish; all the while, teaching and healing, for the very purpose of leading the lost sheep back to the fold.

From His own family, friends, and many followers, there were many misunderstandings. He experienced much lovelessness, and He suffered physical and mental anguish from the Garden of Gethsemane to the Hill of Golgotha. And why did He do all of this? Because He loved us! For what purpose did He suffer and die? It was to purchase our freedom and to secure for us eternal redemption.

To the very task of saving us, He gave all that He was and had. Today, on the Day of Ascension, our brother, our Lord, with body and soul, Human Nature and Divine Nature, enters into heaven and sits at the right hand of God. Not only is Christ, as true man, now able to be present everywhere; now, He fully exercises His divine power over the whole universe. Of this Jesus, now human and divine, ***“He raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”***<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:20-23

He now gives us these great comforts. As our Prophet, He sends people to proclaim the saving Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians records, ***“He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 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, 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. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 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.”***<sup>2</sup> To this end Jesus says, ***“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.”***<sup>3</sup>

As our Priest, He pleads and prays for us before the Father. Romans declares, ***“Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”***<sup>4</sup> Likewise 1 John teaches, ***“We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”***<sup>5</sup>

As King, He rules and protects as recorded in Psalm 110, ***“The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”***<sup>6</sup>

This is reality. The ascension is a historical fact. That is what gives us great comfort in the midst of uncertainty. We do not have to use our imaginations or fabricate a story. That is a gift and there is a place for it; but not in the Scriptures.

It is one of the great gifts I admire in children; their sense of imagination and wonder. When they play, they play the parts of kings and queens, army generals, and pro athletes. Now that school is no longer in session, my home is now a fairy-tale kingdom ruled by princesses, and protected by brave knights. That’s what we expect from kids. Imaginations so grand that the sky’s the limit.

But, as we get older, reality starts to kick in. Maybe I’m not going to be president after

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:10–16

<sup>3</sup> John 16:7

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:34

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 2:1

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 110:1

all. And the odds that I'll play professional sports, or rule a kingdom while riding a unicorn, looks pretty slim.

I suppose the same could be said for our health. We grow for a while in height and in strength, but then it becomes a matter of maintenance, and we start looking good for our age. And it seems that further we advance in years, the less we think about success, and the more we think about survival.

Now, not all of this is bad. For with age and time comes wisdom. And, along the way, people find out that it doesn't really matter if you become king of the hill. You come to see that the best things in this life are simple gifts— faith, family, friends. There's no need for a lavish feast or a million-dollar home. A simple meal among loved ones will do just fine. Thanks be to God for the simple gifts.

But that having been said, we should never completely lose that childlike sense of adventure and wonder. There are opportunities all around us. Even if we've gone off in the wrong direction, we can always make a U-turn. And, on the other hand, there's no reason to rest on our laurels or think a glorious past is our peak; for there lies before us a brighter future. Doors are opening all around us. And no matter what happens, better things are on the way.

Now, don't get me wrong. As Christians, we don't harbor any illusions. Human nature, this side of heaven, is always going to be corrupted with sin. I don't care how many laws we pass or how many self-improvement books we read. When we look at ourselves in the mirror of the Law, we are painfully aware that original sin remains with us. We readily confess with St. Paul, "***The good that we would, we don't do, and that which we don't want to do, we end up doing.***"<sup>7</sup> It's frustrating.

But there is hope. And that's what Ascension Day is all about. It's the day we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ has risen into heaven and has been crowned the King of kings.

"Well," you might say, "Why is that such a big deal? I mean, Jesus is the Son of God. Of course, he's the King." But, on this day, we remember that the one who rules is one of us. Our Brother, a man from Nazareth, has been promoted. A member of our family has climbed the ladder to the top. Somebody who knows our sorrows, our frustrations, and our temptations now sits enthroned at the right hand of God.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Romans 7:19

And that fact bodes very well for our future. You could say that now, we are insiders. It's like being a worker in a company that your uncle happens to own. It's like being the coach's son. Like growing up a Kennedy, a Bush, or a Trump. Call it an unfair advantage if you will, but a man, who happens to be our best Friend, rules in heavenly glory. He's made it to the top and has every intention of bringing us along with him.

God's Word runs the full gamut of emotions. From joy to sadness and everything inbetween. It begins with great wonder and joy in the creation of the cosmos culminating in the pinnacle of creation: mankind. Then it quickly turns to sadness, and it isn't a story about a plague or pestilence, exile or wandering. The downfall, the curse, of all creation begins with but one simple act of disobedience. Adam and Eve had it all. They were the king and queen of all creation, having dominion over the earth. And then, they fell, and they fell hard. Life was completely turned on its head. The order of creation was wholly dislocated and entirely disturbed. Made in God's image, man rejected God for God's creation and ***“exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”***<sup>8</sup>

And so it is—sin has brought down the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve. Sin has made us trivial. Consider how we treat each other. When we put others down, we only show just how small-minded we've become. When we take what isn't ours, we show how we have become enslaved to ordinary things that have no real meaning. When we covet and crave, we demonstrate just how empty we are inside. When we harm others, we show that we are less like kings and queens of God's creation, and more like petty dictators and cheap thugs.

But today, the Day of Ascension, we see the light. The heavens have opened up. And now, not even the sky is the limit. The Holy Spirit testifies, ***“The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.”***<sup>9</sup>

Christ, through His death, has taken our smallness and our pettiness upon Himself.

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<sup>8</sup> Romans 1:23

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:45–49

Though we ignored Him, He was devoted to us. Though we mocked Him, He was big enough to take it. Though we looked down on Him, He lifted us up.

By His resurrection, He has restored our fallen race. And by His ascension into heaven, He gives us a glimpse of our future glory, apart from sin and its meanness. He shows us life where hard hearts become soft and petty people become bighearted. He regenerates our dead hearts in baptism, and renews our minds through His very Gospel. When your baptismal gown was placed on you, when you were washed, however many years ago, you were fitted for royal garments. And, on your confirmation day, as you wore that gown, you were having another dress rehearsal for the glory that awaits. At your funeral, your casket will once again be covered with a white garment as a reminder of the reality of your baptism.

The reality of Christ's Ascension, gives Him the ability to fill the promises of physically, bodily, with both His human and divine natures, to be omnipresent. He can fill the promise that His body sacrificed and His blood shed on the cross can be given to you here, in Guam, in Russia, and on the Moon! It allows Him to keep His promise, "*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*"<sup>10</sup>

Once our sin made us lower than the beasts, but now, even the angels envy us. So, pity the world's powers and principalities. Feel bad for all the stars who don't know what we know. They strut around, not knowing that they're just playing dress up. Meanwhile, we're in line for a promotion that makes theirs seem like child's play. Since our Lord wore a crown of thorns, we'll wear the crown of life.

“Up through endless ranks of angels,  
 Cries of triumph in His ears,  
 To His heav'nly throne ascending,  
 Having vanquished all their fears,  
 Christ looks down upon His faithful,  
 Leaving them in happy tears.”<sup>11</sup>

Alleluia! Christ is ascended! He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 18:20

<sup>11</sup> LSB 491 Up through Endless Ranks of Angels: stanza 1