

Ascension – Vicar Anderson sermon

St. Mark 16:14-20 “Christ’s Ascension is the Hope of My Ascension.”

May 17, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

+ + +

O Jesus Christ, almighty Son of God, You are no longer in humiliation here on earth, but are seated at the right hand of Your Father, Lord over all things: We beseech You, send us Your Holy Spirit; give Your Church pious pastors, preserve Your Word, control and restrain the devil and all who would oppress us; mightily uphold Your kingdom, until all Your enemies have been put under Your feet, that we may hold the victory over sin, death, and the devil; through You, who live and reign with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, by Veit Dietrich, p. 157)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the 16th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, your ascended King and Lord, who lives and reigns over all creation, who is still with you until your ascension, dear fellow redeemed:

A role model is a person looked to by others as an example to be imitated. While baby-sitting I found out how quickly you can be put into that role. Looking back now, I see why parenting can sometimes be difficult. Children watch every single thing that parents do. They watch especially when you think that they are not watching. They point out how impressionable they are. Part of that reason is the trust that they have. Now as children put this trust in their parents and role models, tonight we see Jesus asking for that same trust. Not only is He the one who we want to imitate, and He is our guide, but He is our Savior. And as He ascended into heaven, He puts the trust that we have in Him on display. Jesus assures us with His ascension the hope that we have in Him. We will ascend and meet Him in glory!

St. Mark in this last section of his gospel is giving an overview of Jesus last forty days on earth. In our text we see Jesus rebuking the disciples. "*He rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.*" Now this rebuke is warranted because of what is recorded before our text. Jesus had appeared to three witnesses after His resurrection and only two witnesses proved something happened. Jesus had appeared to three. On that evidence they should have believed that He had risen.

Like the disciples, we can need that same wake up call. The disciples were told by three witnesses. We have the Scriptures. The Old Testament reveals to us what God demands and

promises that someone is going to come and follow those demands perfectly for us. The New Testament reveals to us the heart of the Gospel, Jesus is the Christ who came down from Heaven, lived a perfect life and died for us. When hardships arise in our lives sometimes the first thing we do instead of looking to the Scriptures is look for earthly answers. We forget about God's promises, and we can question if Jesus is even real, our hearts harden. The same eyewitnesses who had unbelief, they wrote down the gospel to be our witnesses.

Are they still believable? Even the disciples questioned Jesus with His death. Tomorrow marks Ascension, He visibly left us. Why would He leave those He loves? Does He care? Shouldn't we get special treatment because we follow Him? This would make a lot of sense if God would come and establish an earthly kingdom. We would want a part ruling in that kingdom. These distractions can move us away from the truth. When it looks like it is us against the world or we are just selfish, we don't want or need that mindset. We have no reason to be selfish or independent. The world wants to be independent, but our independence gets us nowhere.

The command to go into the world also looks as though it is challenging. What will people think of us? We see that they don't like the message that we have. This message points out the truth of what we have done. The truth is that we have made many mistakes. We don't like to hear when we have made mistakes. Jesus then says to share the Gospel. This can even be harder when people are already mad because you first told them that they were doing something wrong, that if they don't change their ways, then they will be condemned. Jesus says, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:31-32). We hear the truth that we have done wrong, but then the Gospel comes in and everything changes.

The disciples are brought to faith once again. Jesus immediately puts them to work. He knows that He is not going to be with them much longer. Jesus commands them that they are to spread the Gospel, baptizing all nations. We see how smart Jesus is. Since the disciples are not perfect, what is to stop them from hardening their hearts again? Jesus allows them to perform signs. These signs are not meant to be used like magical spells. They are meant to help those in need. They are special signs used to prove that the Gospel is true. How could the disciples be lying if the message that they are bringing comes with special signs to help those in need? The disciples speak the truth of Christ, and we see how they go out faithfully to do so. They go out, perform these signs, and they gave their lives to preach this saving truth. Even as their Lord had ascended before their eyes, we see that Jesus never left them. These signs were performed in His name. It was not power of the disciples, but the power was Christ. These signs prove that Christ is still carrying out His Work. His enemies can't stand against Him.

Jesus' time on earth has ended. Like the disciples, we can sometimes struggle to understand this, but Jesus ascended for your benefit. Jesus' ascension means that the Holy Spirit would come to the disciples. As the disciples receive these gifts, it is through the Holy Spirit that Christ comes to you. He uses the means of the Word and sacraments. He tells you the benefit of your baptism. With baptism, you have faith that what Christ did for you is true. He died for your sins on the cross and He rose from the dead for your justification. It is through this work that God finds you not guilty. Your baptism into Christ's death brings forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Your baptism washes away your sins of doubt.

The world will try to convince you that Jesus has left you all alone to live this life on earth. To deal with all these hardships. That is not what His ascension means. If Christ did not ascend, you would have to travel to see Him. He ascended visibly into Heaven so that He can be with you wherever you are. He is not just a man confined to a body; He is true God. Christ is with you wherever you go. You know His presence is here in His Word and Sacraments. You believe this through faith in Christ, faith that you only have because of the work of the Holy Spirit in you.

Through faith in Christ, you see the work of His ascension. You see His authority; Christ puts His work on display for the church. You see Him as a Prophet. He sends trained men to come and share you this gospel message. In His ascension He is also a Priest. He intercedes your prayers on your behalf. Lastly, Christ has taken His crown as King. He has crushed all His enemies. He takes care of you and He will live and reign over the church triumphant when He calls you home. Christ's ascension reveals to you that there is a home that you will go to when you die. Your destination is not to remain here and suffer. Christ ascension, Him not being here, assures you that you do not have to stay here. Jesus has prepared a home for you, the hope of your ascension.

We have tried to look to Christ and imitate Him in our lives. Like the disciples, we have failed to do that, and we will continue to fail as long as we live. Where we are not perfect, our Savior was perfect. He not only lived His life in our place, but He gave up His life so that we would be saved. He brings us that comfort through our baptism, that we are marked children of God. But Jesus couldn't stay with us on earth. The time came for Him to go back to His Father. This happened for us. He didn't abandon us. He left visibly to live and reign over all creation, to be at all places, to protect, and comfort you from all trials and hardships, preparing a place in Heaven for you. We confess our hope with hymn 392, *On Christ's ascension I now built the hope of mine ascension; This hope alone has ever stilled All doubt and apprehension; For where the Head is, there full well I know His members are to dwell When Christ shall come and call them* (ELH 392 v. 1). Amen.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

+ + +