

The Festival of Our Lord's Ascension – Pr. Faugstad exordium & sermon
1 Samuel 8:1-22: "Our King Gives Gifts to Us."
May 31/June 1, 2025 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

+ + +

Beginning forty days before Easter, we recall the intense suffering our Lord Jesus endured for our salvation. Forty days after Easter, we celebrate His glorious ascension. This was His enthronement at the right hand of God the Father, not only as the Son of God but also as the Son of Man. He was welcomed by all the host of heaven as the victorious King, the Conqueror of sin, death, and devil, the Savior of the world.

Jesus ascended visibly into heaven, but He also continues to be with us and bless us here on earth. Just before His ascension, He said to His disciples, *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you"* (Mat. 28:18-20, NKJV). He commissioned the Church to take His powerful Word and Sacraments to every nation, land, and people.

Then He added words that give us great comfort and courage, *"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (v. 20, NKJV). Jesus did not abandon us when He ascended into heaven. He has not left us to fend for ourselves. *"I am with you always,"* He says. As true God, He is present everywhere. And He is specially present when His message of salvation is proclaimed, when the Baptism He instituted is administered, and when His body and blood are distributed in His Holy Supper.

You know just where to find Jesus. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty *right here and right now*. God's right hand touches this pulpit, this font, this altar. His right hand touches our homes, *"where two or three are gathered in [Jesus'] name"* (Mat. 18:20), hearing and learning His Word. Jesus, the victorious Son of God, is present and active here, just as He has promised He would be.

And on the last day, He will return visibly in glory to judge both the living and the dead. Then you and all trust in Him will also ascend. You will join Him in His heavenly kingdom. You will be gathered with all the host of heaven around the throne of God, where rejoicing and gladness never come to an end.

We now stand to sing our festival hymn printed in the service folder, "O Wondrous Conqueror and Great":

O wondrous Conqueror and great,
Scorned by the world You did create,
Your work is all completed!
Your toilsome course is at an end;
You to the Father do ascend,
In royal glory seated.

Lowly,
Holy,
Now victorious,
High and glorious:
Earth and heaven
To Your rule, O Christ, are given.

+ + +

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 written in the eighth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice. / Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking Me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." / So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him. He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day." / But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, "No! But there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king." Samuel then said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city." (ESV)

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

In Christ Jesus, whose kingdom of power, grace, and glory will never end, dear fellow redeemed:

Over the last couple of weeks, we heard how God sent judges to deliver the Israelites from their enemies, judges like Gideon and Samson. After Samson's death, the LORD raised up one of the great leaders of the Israelites, a prophet named Samuel. He judged Israel all the days of his life and faithfully called the wayward Israelites back to the worship of the true God. But Samuel's sons were not like him. He wanted them to continue after him and serve the LORD like he had. They were more interested in using their positions for personal gain.

So the elders of Israel came to Samuel and made a fateful request: "We want to have a king like all the other nations." It was not wrong for them to want a strong leader. It was wrong for them to speak as though they had no king. The LORD God was their king. He had led them out of Egypt to the Promised Land and had given them victory over their enemies. Samuel was troubled by their request. But the LORD told him, *"Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them."*

God would give the people what they asked for, but He warned them that having a king was not as great as they imagined. The people would not listen. They could only see the positives: our king will *"judge us,"* they said, *"and go out before us and fight our battles."* It's the sort of thinking that touches every generation. We are always looking for the next great leader who will fix all the problems in our society—and perhaps even the world—and make us more prosperous and happy than ever before. But as soon as we think we've found people like that, they inevitably disappoint us. They aren't as perfect as we thought they were.

The people of Israel were dreaming about what their new king would *give* them. Samuel informed them about what their king would *take* from them: he would take their sons to fight for him, farm for him, and build for him; he would take their daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers; he would take their fields, vineyards, and olive orchards; he would take their servants, their grain, and their livestock. They would be his slaves.

That does not sound like a good deal. Why would the Israelites want this? Samuel revealed later that they made this request because they were afraid of their enemies (1Sa. 12:12). They did not trust the LORD to protect them. For the next number of weeks, we will learn about the kings of Israel. Some of them served well for a time. But what God warned the people about through Samuel did come true. It wasn't long before the kings required more than they delivered; they took more than they gave. Having a king wasn't as great as the people expected.

We in the United States have no king of our country. The crown was offered to George Washington after the American colonies won the Revolutionary War, but in humility, Washington rejected it. He served as president for two terms and then peacefully stepped aside. We have no king of our country, but we do have a King in the church. This is not the pope. He may be the head of the Roman Church, but he has no divine authority in the holy Christian Church.

The King of our church is no mortal man whose reign is temporary. The King of our church is the crucified and risen Christ, who reigns over all things at the right hand of His Father in

heaven. He left the glories of heaven to take on our human flesh and humbly suffer and die in our place. He hardly looked like a king, except to those who looked upon Him with faith. The thief hanging next to Jesus on the cross was one of these. When He looked at the anguished, bleeding Christ with a crown of thorns on His head, He saw a King who even had power over death. He said, *"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom"* (Luk. 23:42).

Now, beginning with His victory march through hell and His resurrection from the dead, Jesus is exalted. Now He always and fully uses His divine power as God and Man. As our King, Jesus rules over a three-fold kingdom. He rules with power over the whole universe. He rules with grace in His holy Church. And He rules with glory in heaven. Ephesians 1 tells us that God the Father *"raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.... 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"* (vv. 20,22-23).

This passage describes our connection to Christ in the closest terms: He is our Head, and we are members of His body. We live in Him, move in Him, and have our being in Him (Act. 17:28). There is no life apart from Him. He gives us our spiritual health and strength. He makes us fruitful members that desire to do good to the glory of God. He also prepares us to follow Him to heaven, to go where He has gone. One of today's hymns says, *"For where the Head is, there full well / I know His members are to dwell / When Christ shall come and call them"* (Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary #392, v. 1).

Our King does not use His power and authority to boss us around or take things from us. He was not like the Israelite kings that Samuel warned the people about. Jesus does the opposite. He uses His power and authority to bless us by His grace. Ephesians 4 says, *"But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men'"* (vv. 7-8).

The *"host of captives"* includes you and me. We were captive to sin and death by nature. The devil, the prince of demons and darkness, ruled over us. But Jesus broke us out of this prison. The devil, the unbelieving world, and death tried to stop Him, but there was nothing they could do. Our King was too powerful for them. His victory was complete.

He shares this victory with all who trust in Him. *"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."* The gifts He gives to us are the gifts of eternal salvation. He forgives our sins; He covers us in His righteousness; He has prepared a place for us in His kingdom. We couldn't have it better than we have it with our King.

But like the Israelites who wanted to be like the nations around them, we often look for more than what Jesus gives us. We want to have power and success and prosperity *now*. We want to enjoy the good things of *here*. These things seem real to us, unlike the invisible gifts from an invisible King, who promises us a place in a heavenly kingdom we have never seen. And yet we never get as much from the world as we hope we might. We find that despite its promises and seeming advantages, the world *takes* more from us than it *gives*.

Only the grace of God prevails. Only the grace of God gives us what cannot be taken away. Jesus' ascension into heaven was the crowning moment of His saving work. It was the ultimate

recognition that He had accomplished everything His Father sent Him to do. No sin was left unpaid for. No accusation of the devil left unaddressed. No chain of death left unbroken. Everything for salvation was carried out, completed, finished – for you and every sinner.

Our King now sits at the right hand of God the Father dispensing these gifts of His grace. Every day, He hands them out to you, to me, and to all His people all over the world. He never runs out. In fact, He always has grace for more, more who will join Him in His kingdom. This grace comes through the means or channels He has established for giving His gifts. He calls pastors to speak His Word, baptize, and administer His Supper. The pastor is not the King; he is just the courier or the messenger. He only passes on what Jesus has given to His Church.

The Church receives these gifts with joy. We know who our King is, we know what He has done for us, and we know He is preparing us for even greater things when He returns in glory.

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.

+ + +