

The Festival of the Ascension of our Lord
St. Mark 16:14-20
May 21st, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

He Was Received Up into Heaven

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Jesus Christ, Thou Almighty Son of God, Who art no longer in humiliation here on Earth, but sittest at the right hand of Thy Father, Lord over all things: We beseech Thee, send us Thy Holy Spirit; give Thy Church pious pastors, preserve Thy Word, control and restrain the devil and all who would oppress us: mightily uphold Thy Kingdom, until all Thine enemies shall have been put under Thy feet, that we may hold the victory over sin, death, and the devil, through Thee, Who livest and reignest with God the Father and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today our Lord + Jesus Christ ascends into Heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father to intercede for us poor, miserable sinners. He will come again on the Last Day to judge both the quick and the dead. His reign will have no end. His Kingdom will last forever. We are a part of that Kingdom through the faith created in us by the Holy Ghost working through the waters of Holy Baptism and the preaching of the Word of God. Our Lord + Jesus is present with us whenever we gather in His Name. As He promised He is with us even if that gathering is only two or three people. He is present with us in His Word and Sacraments. He is here with us today, because we have gathered to hear His Word and receive His Blessed Sacrament.

This was the promise that the Lord + Jesus made to His Apostles before He ascended into Heaven. They would receive the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost, the Comforter, was sent to us—to the Church—to lead us into the way of truth. He reveals the truth of the Gospel to us through the blessed means of grace. The salvific acts of our Lord + Jesus are proclaimed through the means of grace. What He has done for us to rescue us from sin, death, and the devil are revealed to us whenever we gather together in the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ.

This is all due to the preaching of the Apostles. Our Lord + Jesus commanded them to go into all the world and preach. As the Evangelist St. Luke writes in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostles would preach the Gospel beginning in Jerusalem and that Gospel would spread into all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth. The message that they preached was the same message that you all hear today: that salvation is found only in the works and the merits of the Christ—our Lord + Jesus.

Salvation is not found in our works. We are, as we confessed earlier, poor, miserable sinners. We are in need of God's grace. In contrition we turn from our sins, exposing them for what they truly are. We confess that we are indeed unworthy of the grace that is given to us by the Lord + Jesus. We sin daily, and much. If salvation is dependent upon what we do, or do not do, we will be lost. For our

keeping of the Law needs to be perfect. We know, if we are honest with ourselves, that our works are nowhere near perfect. Not one bit! Therefore, salvation cannot be found in what we do, or say, or think. Our salvation is found only in the One Whose works are perfect; in the One Who sits at the right hand of God the Father interceding to us; the One of Whom the Holy Ghost testifies to us through the preaching of the Word and the Blessed Sacraments.

The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh so war against this truth that we are constantly under attack both outwardly from the world, and inwardly as we face the horrors of our sin-filled conscience. Because of this war with sin, death and the devil, we are constantly tested and refined. We fail often. We long for the day when we will no longer be tormented by sin and shame. We long for the day when we will no longer have to endure the fear of death, or witness the death of those whom we love. We long for the day when we will be perfected even as our Lord + Jesus was perfect in every way.

Our Lord + Jesus on the day of His Ascension, promises His Apostles and disciples (and us, too) that He would come again. He promises this through two angels. They promised that the Lord + Jesus would come again in glory in the same way that they saw Him ascend. The Apostles were caught gazing up into Heaven, as if the Lord + Jesus was going to return to them in that very hour. But their task was not to stand gazing up into Heaven. They were to go into all the world and be eyewitnesses to the world of the works and merits of the Christ. They were to preach the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus to the ends of the world; to all people everywhere.

They were to baptize all nations in the waters of Holy Baptism, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. They were not only supposed to abide in Jerusalem until they had received the Holy Ghost, but after they received Him, they were to take the things that they had seen to the whole world. They would plant many churches. They would baptize many into the Church. They would change this world forever. No longer would the Triune Lord God only be known to the Jews, but all the world now has heard of the Lord + Jesus.

There are certainly those who hear and still reject the truth of the Gospel; they still desire to remain in their unbelief. But to those who have received the Word and believe, they have received forgiveness, life and salvation.

We also can be tempted to be like the Apostle who were caught gazing up into Heaven as if the Lord + Jesus was going to return that very moment. Certainly, our desire for the Last Day to come; for the rescue from this spiritual war to end prompts our response. It is only natural to desire to enter into our eternal home. It is natural for us to desire to be without sin, and no longer have to struggle daily with the maladies that we face. We should long for that day, but we should not let it hinder us from the task that our Lord + Jesus has given to us. It is the same task that was given to the Apostles: to preach the Gospel of the Lord + Jesus Christ in its truth and purity, and to administer the Sacraments according to Christ's institution.

The Apostles were charged with bringing the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. We are tasked with bringing the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus Christ to the small corner of the world in which we live. We have certainly brought the Gospel to our small corner of the world. Here in Simpsonville, and in Myrtle Beach and in Augusta, GA. We are even reaching out to the folks in Knoxville, TN. In all these places we are preaching the Word of God in its truth and purity and administering the Blessed Sacraments according to Christ's institution. In all these places the Lord + Jesus is gathering together with us around His means of grace. In all these places the Holy Ghost is leading us into the way of truth. We are being shown how gracious and loving our Lord + Jesus is to us; how He is reaching out to the world through us, to bring His people—His sheep—into His fold of the Church.

But because of the constant attacks of the devil, the world and the flesh, it is also easy for us to

lose heart. We are tempted to stand gazing at the smallness of our gatherings; how few there are who cling to the Lord + Jesus in faith. On account of this we may be tempted to seek out so-called greener pastures: larger churches; a more winsome pastor; more convenient worship times and styles, and the like. But it is here that we will always find the Gospel preached in its truth and purity. We will always find the sacraments diligently administered according to how our Lord + Jesus would have them ministered to us. Here you will find that your soul is cared for in such a way that the truth is never comprised for the sake of confirming you in your behavior. In this place, you will be stripped of your sins and your works, and be given only the works and merits of the Christ—our Lord + Jesus.

Our Lord + Jesus Christ sits on the right hand of the Father. He was received up into Heaven to intercede for us poor, miserable sinners. He knows our weaknesses and our struggles, and His perfect obedience to the Law and will of God and the marks on His hands, feet and side are an eternal testimony that He has paid the price of our sins, and has made atonement for us and all the world. We cling to Him in faith for He is our One and Only salvation from our sins. This is why in a little while we will gather around this altar and receive our Lord's Body and Blood in bread and wine. In this sacrament we remember the sacrifice that our Lord + Jesus accomplished for us with His Body and Blood. This meal is an eternal memorial of what He has done for us.

This sacrament reminds us why we gather for worship in this place. We gather to remember and proclaim that our Lord + Jesus suffered and died for us on the tree of the holy cross. The Holy Ghost is working through this sacrament to enlighten us to this truth. Even as He works through the preaching of the Word and Holy Baptism and Holy Absolution to keep on reminding us poor, miserable sinners that our salvation is not found in ourselves—what we say, think or do—but in the blessed works and merits of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ.

Today, we celebrate the fact that He now sits on the right hand of the Father to intercede for us until He calls us to our eternal home. We celebrate the fact that on the Last Day, our graves will be opened up and we will enter into our eternal home in Heaven, and join with all the saints and angels in singing the eternal Liturgy of the Lamb in His Kingdom, which has no end. May the Triune Lord God keep and preserve us in this faith until that day. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Son of the Most High, Who no longer dwellest on Earth in lowliness and poverty, but art seated at the right hand of the Father, a Mighty Lord over all things in Heaven and on Earth, filling and ruling all: we beseech Thee, send us Thy Holy Spirit, give us faithful ministers, endow them with Thy gifts and keep them in Thy Word, hinder Satan and all tyrants, and mightily protect Thy Kingdom on Earth, until all enemies are laid at Thy feet, and we overcome sin, death, and all things by Thee, Who livest and reignest with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!