

ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Acts 1:1-11

Today we are celebrating the Ascension of Jesus to heaven. We have heard how Jesus went with his disciples to Bethany and gave them some final instructions about the coming of the Holy Spirit, and how they were to be his witnesses to the far corners of the world. When he had finished speaking to them, he was taken up to heaven and he was eventually hidden from their sight by a cloud.

Ascension Day is one of those special days in the church calendar that is hardly remembered. There is no special holiday to mark the occasion. It is work as usual for most and not many Christians remember Christ's ascension to heaven as they go about their busy lives. We don't even talk about Jesus ascending to heaven very much, because to the modern mind, it is quite humorous to think of a man suddenly lifting off the ground and disappearing behind the clouds. The ascension story doesn't fit into modern thinking anymore; it's not mentioned in the Bible very much and it falls on a workday. Who needs it?

Believe it or not, Christ's ascension to heaven adds quite a bit to our understanding of the Christian faith. Christ's ascension is an essential part of the Gospel message. We say in the Apostles' Creed, *"He ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty"*. When we talk about Jesus sitting at God's right hand, we are saying that he has all

the power and the glory of God. There is nothing or no person more powerful than the ascended Jesus. He is ruler and Lord over all things. At our baptism, we became members of God's kingdom. The ascended Jesus is *our* Lord and King. We are God's own people. We have a new life that is lived under the lordship of Jesus.

The early Christians confessed, "*Jesus is Lord*". The Ascension points to his lordship, not only over suffering and death, but also over the nations, the principalities and powers that threaten both the present and the future, and that includes the power of Satan. Jesus Christ has no rival to his power in this world or in the spirit world. He is eternally triumphant and he will reign forever more! His power far exceeds that of Satan or death. No matter what problems we face, Jesus rules with power. When our prayers contain the seeming impossibility, nothing is beyond his power.

We might well say, "What has all this got to do with anything in my life or our world? I've come to church today worried about my health, my family, my job, my bills, my grief, my fears, and a bunch of other things. So who wants to talk about Jesus sitting at God's right hand in heaven? What has Jesus' ascension got to do with anything in my life anyway?"

First, let's be clear about where Jesus is right now. We could think that since the disciples saw Jesus ascend from the earth and go up through the clouds that he has left us and gone somewhere else. Don't we often talk about God as being "up there" as we point heavenward? Or when we talk about those who have died as going "up to heaven"? Jesus did go up, ascend, and leave the disciples that day, but he left this earth so

that he could be the ever and always present God. He is Lord of all and he is wherever we are.

And it is at this point that the ascension of Jesus has something to say about our health, our family, our grief, and our fears. As Lord and King he is not only right here with us as we strive to come to terms with all of the things that upset and cause us grief, but he also has the power to do something about it. He promised just before the ascension, "*I will be with you always, to the end of the age*". He has promised to be our help and support when things are getting us down, and we don't have the strength within us to keep on going, or are stressed at how everything will turn out.

When we dread what the doctor will say; when we stand at the grave of a loved one; when a child gives us one headache after another; when we worry about finances, retirement, and the bills; when we toss and turn at night with every kind of fear and anxiety spinning around in our head; we are reminded that the ascended Jesus is far greater than any trouble that distresses us.

Jesus doesn't only minister to us, he *ministers to others through us*. How will others get to know of God's saving grace, and the power, and the love of Christ available to them, if not through us? Through us, his disciples, Jesus brings comfort to the sick and the dying, he gives friendship to the lonely and the stranger. Through us he comes into the hearts of others when we grasp windows of opportunity that arise in our daily dealings with others, to share what it means to know Christ and the comfort that comes from knowing that he is near and ready to help in times of need. Being in his kingdom under his lordship means a life of service to others, commitment to those things

that Jesus is committed to: love, forgiveness, helping, an upright and decent life.

When the disciples were gazing up into the sky to catch a final glimpse of Jesus, two angels told them Jesus will return. We are in the time between the ascension and Jesus' return. The Kingdom of God has come, but it is not yet here in all its fullness and completeness. As we wait for God's Kingdom to come when Christ returns, we have been given the task of carrying on Christ's ministry. As we wait, we are called on to trust in the Lord, remember he has all power and authority, he has promised his continual presence.

The Ascension reminds us that we have a Lord who came and gave his life for us. He rose so that we can be free of fear. He rules heaven and earth assuring us that in the face of any evil force, he is Lord.

When the disciples had seen Jesus ascend, they went back to Jerusalem where they worshipped God. Today let us join with them and with those gathered around the heavenly throne, and give glory to our ascended Lord and King, who has promised his help and presence as we live in this age before his Second Coming. Let's get on with it, and live for Jesus carrying out the task, the ministry, he has given us to do. *"There is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord".*

AMEN.