

God has gone up with a shout - The LORD with the sound of a trumpet!

Ascension Day
May 13, 2010
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Hecla

Text: Ephesians 4:7-16

Hymn: 216:1

Theme: The Blessings of Ascension

- Jesus fills all things

216:2

- Jesus gives gifts to His Church

216:3

- Growing up together in love

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus, our ascended Lord who fills all in all, grace and peace to you in His name,

If someone were to ask you what the big deal is about Good Friday, how would answer? "What's the big deal about Good Friday?! That was the day that the Son of God died to save me! That was the day that Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice for my sin! That was the day my Savior Jesus did everything necessary for me to be forgiven! That's the big deal about Good Friday!" We all know the blessings of Good Friday. I think the same could be said about Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. We know the blessings of those special days. We know why at those times of year we have special worship services.

But what about Ascension Day? If someone were to ask you what the big deal about Ascension Day, would you know what to answer? It is getting more and more rare to hear of churches having services on Ascension Day. As far as I know we are the only church in Hecla having services tonight. When one of our kids said she wouldn't be able to attend a school concert because of church tonight, many of her church-going friends had no idea why there would be church tonight. So why are we here tonight? What are the blessings of Ascension? Let us explore this question tonight as we hear of the blessings that Jesus fills all things, that Jesus has given gifts to the Church, and that we get to grow up together in Christ.

To guide us this evening we turn to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter four, beginning with the seventh verse:

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this, "He ascended" -- what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every

wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ -- 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

This is the Word of God given by inspiration of His holy Spirit for the growth of the body of Christ. This is the one sure foundation on which you can build your faith and your hope for eternal life. That God would use His Word to set us apart for His holy purposes, we pray, “*Lord, sanctify us by Your truth, Your word is truth.*” Amen.

JESUS FILLS ALL THINGS

Do you find it rather odd that we joyously celebrate a day when Jesus left us? Usually when people leave us it makes us sad. We cry at graduation wondering if we will see our classmates ever again, we cry when our friends move away, and we cry at funerals. But when Jesus departed earth and ascended into heaven, we rejoice? Seems like an odd reaction. Wouldn't it have been better if Jesus hadn't ascended into heaven? Then Jesus would still be with us. We could look at the nail prints in His hands and feet. We could hear the voice of our Good Shepherd as He speaks to us.

It seems as though the apostles didn't know how to react when they saw Jesus ascend into heaven. We heard today how after Jesus ascended that they continued to look “steadfastly into heaven.” (Acts 1:10) It took to angels to tell them what to do next. We know that after Jesus rose from the dead that Mary Magdalene didn't want to see Jesus go anywhere and she clung to Him. But how did Jesus react? “*Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’*” (Jn 20:17) Jesus' work was not done with His resurrection. His ascension into heaven was an important and essential part of His redemptive work.

When the Son of God humbled Himself and became true Man in the womb of the virgin Mary, He laid aside His omnipresence. That is Jesus was only in one place at one time. But that all changed when Jesus ascended into heaven. Paul writes in verses 9 and 10, *Now this, "He ascended" -- what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.* One of the great blessings of Ascension is that Jesus now fills all things. Jesus is no longer limited to one place at one time. He is able to be with all believers at all times. Because Jesus fills all things He keeps His Great Commission promise, “*And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*” (Mt 28:20b) Because He fills all things, Jesus can keep His promise to be with every single Christian assembly around the world at the same time. “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*” (Mt 18:20) Because Jesus fills all things He can be with you when you are at school and your dad when he is in the field.

This is one of the blessings of Ascension - having ascended to God's right hand, Jesus fills all things.

HYMN 216:2

JESUS GIVES GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

So are any of you going to go home and open presents tonight? Probably not. Typically we do gift exchanges on Christmas and maybe on Easter. As far as I know, I've never heard of anyone opening Ascension Day gifts. But as we hear of another of the blessings of Ascension in our text, we are left to wonder if that might not be a good tradition to begin. Listen to verses seven and eight again, ***“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’”*** Another of the blessings of Ascension are the gifts which Jesus gives to His Church.

Paul says that the Ascended Lord has given each of us gifts. In His wisdom and grace He measured out different gifts for each believer. Some of those gifts he lists in verse 11, ***“He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.”*** These are some of the gifts which the Ascended Lord gave to His Church. The Apostles are the Twelve men that Jesus personally called and sent out to spread the Gospel. It was through these Apostles that Jesus would lay the foundation of the Church by their inspired writings. Jesus also gave prophets as gifts to His Church. We hear of one prophet Jesus gave the Church in Acts named Agabus, who foretold future events. In 1 Corinthians we also hear of prophets who served the Church by expounding on the Word of God. We also know of the gospel preaching evangelists such as Philip who brought the good news about Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. Of the gifts mentioned here, we are most familiar with pastors and teachers. Jesus has given these gifts to His Church to shepherd His people and teach them His Word.

This is by no means a complete list of the gifts our ascended Lord has given to His Church. In Romans and 1 Corinthians we hear of the gifts of miracles, healing, speaking and interpreting different languages, helping, administration serving, teaching, exhorting, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy. The point is that Jesus has given each one of you different gifts - gifts which fulfill a unique need in His Church. Gifts which our ascended Lord wants you to put to use for the good of His Church. This is another one of the blessings of Ascension - Jesus giving gifts to His Church.

HYMN 216:3

GROWING UP TOGETHER IN LOVE

Paul writes of the purpose of the gifts our ascended Lord has given to His Church in verse 12, ***“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”*** Whether it is apostle, prophet, evangelist, or pastor and teacher the goal is to equip you for the work of service in the kingdom of God. And your work of service is done for the building up of the body of Christ. This was why Jesus gave such different gifts to His Church - that we might grow up together in Christ. This is another of the blessings of Ascension.

Throughout Scripture the Holy Christian Church is pictured as a body with Christ as its head. As our own bodies have grown throughout our lives, so too do we grow as members of the body of Christ. When we were brought to faith in Christ we were infants in the faith. As infants in the faith we needed to grow in the basic teachings of Christ. Things like baptism, Creation, the Trinity, salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, the resurrection, and the Last Day. The milk, as it were, of God’s Word.

But once we learn about those basic teachings of Scripture we are by no means done

growing in our faith. As long as we have breath in our lungs there is more growing to be done. We need to go from being nursed on the bottle, to dining on the meatier parts of Scripture. The body of Christ needs to continue to grow up, ***“till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*** We will never come to a perfect or complete man of faith until we are in heaven. We will never reach the measure for the stature of the fullness of Christ until we see Jesus face to face.

Until that time we have growing to do, don't we. By no means have we begun to plunge the depths of God's Word. We need to continue, as Paul writes in verse 15, ***“speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ.”*** We speak the truth of God's Word in love and thereby continue growing up together in Christ.

But this cannot be done in isolation. Every single Christian is important as we mature in the faith. ***“Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*** Only when every part does its share does the body grow up. Together we support and strengthen one another in the faith. YOU are important, no, you are ESSENTIAL to this growing and maturing. Jesus needs you and your fellow believer needs you to do your part to help build up the body in love. This is another of the blessings of Ascension - using the gifts He has given us to grow up together in love.

So what's the big deal about Ascension Day? Do you think you could answer that question now? This is the day that our crucified and risen Lord ascended to His rightful place - at the right hand of God the Father almighty. There He fills all things - in heaven and on earth. Jesus ascended into heaven to give each one of us gifts - gifts that He wants us to use to help build up the body of Christ. These are just some of the blessings of Ascension and this is the reason we assemble to worship our Savior on this day! Praise be to Jesus, our Ascended Lord! Amen!