

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

May 1, 2005
6th Sunday of Easter
Ephesians 1:15-23
Pastor Randy Ott

Walk With the Ascended Jesus

What is your favorite kind of walk to take? Is it walking holding your mother's or father's hands some place? Is that something you enjoy as a child or maybe as a parent? Is it walking hand in hand with your spouse? Is it walking with a golf club in your hand chasing a little white ball around some green things or some tall green grass? As you think about which is your favorite kind of walk, do you think about one of these or something else, or do you think about walking together with your brothers and sisters in the faith? This morning, that is what Paul really talks about as one of his favorite kinds of walk. That kind of walk only comes about because first of all we walk together with the ascended Savior and because we walk hand in hand with him, no matter what we face in life, there is joy in every other kind of walk you could possibly think of.

This morning we want to focus on walking together with the ascended Savior. We focus now on our ascended Savior, on the threshold of Ascension (which is this coming Thursday), and we see some truths in these words from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The truth I want you to focus on today is that as we walk together and we walk with the ascended Jesus. We also are encouraged here to pray for those who walk with him and walk with us. Secondly, we are encouraged to take strength for our walk in God's Word, not in our own abilities, not in our own minds—but in God's Word and the wisdom and revelation that's found there. Finally, because Jesus has ascended and he rules over all things for the church, there is a power that we walk with and in that is unlike any other. We walk in this power as we walk together as the body of Christ with Jesus as the head—not ourselves as the head as so often we are tempted.

Walk with the ascended Jesus. When Paul wrote our text to the Ephesians, he had spent two years in Ephesus—a lot longer time than he had spent in many places—ministering and teaching and preaching among the Christians and unbelievers there. There was a closeness that you can see between himself and the Ephesians as he writes. Just even in this greeting at the beginning of the letter, you can hear him almost gushing about these people and his close ties to them and the love that he carries for them on his heart. He says, *"...since I heard about your faith...I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."* Even before they became so special and dear to him, he rejoiced and he prayed for them because they were walking together in the ascended Savior. Even though he couldn't name a single one of their names or put a name to a face, he still thanked God for them. He still remembered them in his prayers. He still found joy in walking together with them.

Walking together as a congregation, we are encouraged by God to pray for one another. We can put faces in pews and in the basement. We might not always be able to put the names to them, but if worse comes to worse, we walk over to someone and

whisper to them, “Who is that over there? I don’t remember their name.” Or we get out the directory when we get home and we can put names to faces. It is a blessing that we have as a congregation. God encourages us to be thankful for those that we walk together in faith with—to pray for them, to thank God that we walk together in this faith.

It sounds simple. It sounds easy. Do you find yourself always doing it? Do you find yourself at times focused more on prayers for yourself as opposed to prayers for others or prayers for others in need? We have a tendency to associate prayer more with need. But here Paul is just talking about expressing thanksgiving and praise to God that they walk together. I don’t know that I find myself doing that as often as I should. And we stop and think why? It’s probably because of one of the simple truths about you and I—we are sinners. Sin makes us selfish. We focus on ourselves as opposed to others. We want the universe to revolve around us and how others should be helping and serving us, and at times we forget that God has placed them here to help us—true—but he also placed us here to help them and to pray for them. We don’t always do it. That’s why it is so precious that we can walk with the ascended Jesus, because you and I are sinners and we need someone to take that sin away because we can’t do it. We can’t make up for it by next week praying nonstop for one another so that God will forgive us for the times that we have been selfish and only focused on ourselves. That is not going to take away that sin. But Jesus’ life in our place, Jesus’ death in our place—that takes away that sin.

We walk together with the ascended Jesus, and because we walk with him, now we grow to love and appreciate each other even more. We carry for each other a love. Our sinful nature at times gets in the way of expressing that love, and we don’t do it like the new self in us wants. Think about it. At times within the congregation and at times within the synod you see people coming together and doing greater things together than they could possibly do on their own. The love that is expressed in prayers and words of concern and encouragement—words that take each other back to Jesus’ love for us in Christ—you see that in our congregation. You see that in our church body.

What a blessing it is to know that we have brothers and sisters in Christ around the world that we have never met but God has given to us the privilege to thank God for them, to pray for them, and to be encouraged by the fact that they are there. It’s one of the blessings we have. It’s one of privileges we have of walking with the ascended Jesus.

Walking with the ascended Jesus also, as Paul tells us this morning, means taking the time to find strength in his Word for our walk. I am absolutely certain that if I would actually break down and get a lesson on how to chase that white ball around the golf course, I would be a better golfer. But when it comes right down to it, I don’t care. I still enjoy how I am playing now, so what is the difference. It’s not that big of a deal. But if I take that same kind of attitude and apply it to my walk with the ascended Jesus, I have a little bit more of a problem, because this is a big deal. As I walk with the ascended Jesus in this world, there are going to be things that try to drive a wedge between me and Jesus. There is going to be Satan, the world, or my own sinful flesh that are going to find other things that are more important to do than to live my faith to the glory of God. I am going to run into all kinds of challenges. That is why I need strength. I need something more than what is within me. That is why Paul says he prays for the

Ephesians that God may open their eyes that they might have wisdom and revelation—so that they might know God better, so that the eyes of their heart may be enlightened.

Wisdom and revelation is what he wanted them to have. Wisdom—not just head knowledge, but the ability to take that head knowledge and to apply it to a problem in a practical and beneficial way. That is what he is praying for—enlightenment that God would open up their eyes to what God wants them to do and would reveal himself to them more and more. That is what he is praying for—that revelation, that enlightenment.

As we walk together in Christ, we need to walk closer with the ascended Jesus so that his Word strengthens us beyond where we are now. We can always know Christ better. We can always have a faith that grows as God unveils to us a fuller picture of the depth of his love for us. God's love for us in Christ is so shallow a pool that we can all wade in it and even the smallest child here can understand that "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." But God's love for us in Christ is also such a deep body of water that it will drown an elephant. There is so much in there that you and I will never understand. We can constantly be growing and knowing more than we knew the day before.

As we walk together in Jesus, we need to pray that God gives the leaders in our congregation this kind of wisdom and revelation so they lead us in a way that brings him glory—so that they lead us in a way that is determined by his Word and not our whims—by his direction, not the things that come to our minds.

The same thing is true on the synod level. We walk together with a larger group of Christians, and they bring us so many blessings. One of the blessings they bring us is understanding God's Word better. They train pastors and teachers so they can come and share God's Word with us, so that we in turn can go out and reach out to others and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them.

Walking together in Christ enables us to know Christ better than if we were all by ourselves. God tells us as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. That is what we do when we get together and discuss God's Word and discuss his will for our congregation, his will for our church body. We get sharper and God strengthens us.

Then we are told this morning an incredible thing. God gives us a power that is beyond our own. Then he goes so far as to say something that really should amaze us and send a chill up our spine as we consider it this morning. The more that we know Christ, the more that we walk with the ascended Savior and know his Word better and better, the same power then is at work in us as the power that raised him from the dead, the power that seated him at the right hand of God, the power that he now exercises as he rules over everything for the benefit of the church. That kind of power is there in you. It is in the Gospel that God speaks to you. God wants to work it through you.

Think of how often we say, "Not me. There he is Lord, send him." God tells us the power is in us. Think of how important this power is that God says is in us. This past week in our congregation we had two funerals. The power of God's Word—I've seen it at work in the heart of those whom the Lord called to heaven and those that the Lord has left behind. The power of God's Word works to strengthen us and encourage us

even as we face loss and grief. Think of what a precious power that is that God gives to us. But he doesn't just give it to us to hoard it to ourselves. The more we give it away—it doesn't mean the less for us. The more we share this power with one another as we walk together as the body of Christ, under HIM as the head, following HIS lead and HIS direction, using HIS power, the more God will do through us. Sometimes we forget that truth. Sometimes we act as though we are the head and God is just around some place or other. NO—we are the body, HE is the head. HE sets the direction—we follow.

Think of how often as a congregation, we will talk about why things won't work. We get together at a meeting and say we can't do outreach, it won't work around here, everyone around here is a Christian. Don't tell me why it won't work. Tell me what God's will is. What is the head telling us he wants us to do? We can't afford this, we can't afford that—don't tell me what we can't do. Tell me what God's will is and then trust in HIS power to accomplish these things.

The same thing is true on a synod level. As the synod faces challenges and difficulties, we can sit back and say, "They don't know what they are doing." Or we can say, "God is the head. What is his will for us as we walk together as a church body?"

Tell me if things are God's will, because that is what we are supposed to be following. Then let's work together to see how we can use his power to accomplish the incredible things he sets in front of us. Whether it is as a church body or as a congregation, God's power is at work IN us, AMONG us, and THROUGH us. You are plugged into a power source that is unlike any other. You have the Gospel of Jesus Christ to speak to one another, to assure guilty consciences that they are forgiven and that heaven is theirs. You have the Gospel that encourages us and motivates us to do what is right before God—not because we have to, but because WE WANT TO THANK THE GOD WHO LOVED US ENOUGH TO DIE FOR US AND TAKE AWAY OUR SINS.

This isn't a walk. This is power. And it is yours, in Christ.