



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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May 17, 2012

Ascension of Our Lord

Sermon Text: [Luke 24:44-53](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 47](#)

Lesson: [Colossians 3:1-4](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 24:44-53](#)

Celebrate The Lord's Ascension

Understand the Word

Carry out His task

Praise His name

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

Every family has their own traditions for celebrating various events. You probably have family traditions that deal with how you celebrate a birthday, how you celebrate Christmas, or how you celebrate Easter. There are certain things you do every year and you find kind of a comfort and a peace in that routine, that ritual of routine. That can be a wonderful blessing. On Christmas and Easter, there are all kinds of things that people do. A lot of them really don't have to do with the events that we are celebrating as Christians anymore. They are more because of how society has shaped and changed us.

Ascension really hasn't been overrun with that, has it? We don't have people asking each other during the last couple of weeks, "What are you doing for Ascension?" You probably get that question before Christmas and Easter, but you don't get it before Ascension.

Here is a great chance for us, as the people of God, to say "Okay, we haven't been overrun with what society has imposed on us as things you do to celebrate these Christian events. We can take a look and say 'Hey! How would Jesus have us celebrate his visible presence leaving his disciples?'" How would he want us to celebrate the Lord's Ascension? He certainly would want us to celebrate it, because he has ascended into heaven, where he is at the right hand of God, interceding for us, ruling over us, where he is being a great blessing to us. It's something to celebrate.

This evening we'll consider what Jesus said in what I just read to you, what some consider the summary of Luke's accounts of all of his resurrection appearances right up to Ascension. Some claim it's closer to just the Ascension Day, but either way you take it, I think all these things fit with how the Lord wants us to celebrate his Ascension.

God's celebration doesn't deal with the ritual that might come with cakes and candles, with wrapping paper and trees. His routine and ritual to celebrate his Ascension he lays out for us as a daily event. "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures." One way that God wants us to celebrate his Ascension is to make use of

his Word and get to know him better. His visible presence has left us, but he has not left us. He has left us with his Word. He has left us with his Sacraments. He wants us to use them so we grow in our understanding of who he is and who we are and why it is so absolutely amazing that he did what he did. When you see that Scripture tells you “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations,” we ought to be marveling at that. If we take that ritual of routine, repentance and forgiveness, for granted, we have a problem. If this no longer thrills us, we have a problem.

If you spend time in his Word, you see day after day that God lays out quite clearly what wretched sinners we are. We get so full of ourselves. We get arrogant. We think we know it all and don't really need it, or we don't need to study it more because we know enough.

Here's Jesus, who opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. These are the guys he had spent three years with. They had walked around. He taught them in parables. He taught them in clear speech. He taught them by example. He taught them in every way possible. These guys, who you would say had every advantage, they still said, as Luke tells us in his Book the Acts of the apostles, when they got out to the Mount of Olives where Jesus was going to ascend, they said to him “At this time are you going to establish the kingdom?” He opened their minds so they could understand Scripture, but it didn't sink in very far or very deep evidently because they didn't quite get it. He opened their minds so they could understand, “This is what was written: repentance and forgiveness of sins. This Christ will die. The Christ will rise again.” Yet they were so wrapped up in the way they had always done things, the way they had always thought about God's kingdom even though he had given them a three-year crash course in the kingdom of God. They had the caps and gowns on and walked down the aisle and they still didn't get it because they were so used to their own expectations and they had a sinful nature. Even though Jesus had changed and shaped their expectations, they still didn't get it because their sinful nature still won some of the battles.

Is that any different for us? Are we always instructed by the Word? Do we turn to the Word for our direction and why we are here and what we are to be doing? Or do we do the same thing they did? “This is what we've always done, so it must be what we are supposed to be doing.” It's fascinating at times how much we are shaped by what we do as opposed to what God actually says in Scripture.

It's fascinating to see people when they dig into Scripture and dig deep and study it and look at it to see the Spirit shape them and change them and have their eyes opened to things that all their life, they are familiar with the phrases, but now the Spirit has given them understanding. With understanding comes joy. With understanding comes joy and purpose. And with that purpose comes a desire to serve, not because that's just what you do, but because you are changed and you are shaped by God.

I think sometimes we cheat ourselves out of that because we don't spend enough time in the Word of God. We don't let it shape and mold us. We are shaped and molded by what we did this time last year, or what our congregation has always done, or that's the way it's always been and "I don't need to know why we do those things. We just do them." That's kind of like expecting that God's kingdom was going to be a kingdom of glory on this earth because that's what the people always had expected.

One of the ways God wants us to celebrate his Ascension is to understand his Word, understand why he went to heaven, so that his visible presence wouldn't be relied on, so we would get busy doing the work he has given us, to understand what he is doing in heaven, which we'll look at this weekend. We know he ascended. We say it every week. But do we understand the why and what that means for us? I'm not always convinced.

Jesus tells us that this is what Scripture always said. And then Scripture said repentance and forgiveness of sins is going to be preached. You are the witnesses. You are going to go do it. He says "Wait in the city until the power comes and then go do it, but you are going to have to go do it. You are the witnesses. You are going to have to tell this," as Luke tells us in the Book of Acts, "in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth." But God has left and went to heaven so that we would understand that now it's our task to preach the good news to the kingdom and we don't sit back and wait for him to do it all. He does it through you and through me. He does it through his people, through the believers that are witnesses of these truths. He leaves us here on earth, he didn't take us with him to heaven, so that we would be strengthened by him and then serve him by proclaiming his good news to ALL people. Doing it to ALL people means that sometimes we have to take a step out of our comfort zone. We have to get out there and talk to people and we have to share the Word of God. It's not a have to, but this is the privilege that our God has given us. This is how we celebrate his Ascension, by carrying out the task he has given us.

They had to wait for 10 more days, until Pentecost. You and I don't. The Spirit has already been poured out on us. The Spirit that was poured out on them is the same Spirit that has been poured out on us in our Baptism, through the Word, and through the Sacrament. He is the one that opens our eyes and gives us the understanding. He's the one that motivates us to serve, when we are at our best. When we're not at our best, we serve because we feel we have to, we serve because it has to be done and all these other reasons that I hear people talking about. But when we are at our best, we serve because repentance and forgiveness of sins is not something we just proclaim. It's something we rejoice in because it applies directly to us.

We are sinners who have been forgiven. We have received the greatest gift possible. Now we've been given the greatest task possible, which is sharing the good news of salvation with others. That's the task he's given us. You and I can find excuses why we shouldn't do it. "I haven't been trained as well as the pastor. That's the pastor's job. That's the teacher's job." God says it's your job. If you want to argue with him, go ahead. You'll lose. He's told you it's your job. Understand his Word, and then share

his Word. People don't listen to you? So what? You guys still tell me all the time about the Packers. I don't listen. I don't care, but you keep talking about them. Why can't you talk about your Savior? He's more important.

When we understand this gift he has given us by leaving us and saying "I'm going to rule over everything and I'm going to be with you always. I'm going to give you power. All authority belongs to me, and I'm going to give it to you. I'm going to give you power that you could never have if I stay here. I am going to send you the comfort of the Counselor, the Spirit." Then we are changed. We are different.

Did you notice at the end of what I read to here how different these guys were? These were the guys that 40 days earlier were locked together in the Upper Room, who 33 days earlier, a week after Easter, were still locked behind closed doors because they were afraid. They were fearful. They didn't want others to find them because they thought they still might be arrested, still might be killed, still might face the same thing Jesus faced. Fear paralyzed them. But when the power of the Spirit came on them, things changed. Even before the power of the Spirit came on them, things changed.

Jesus told them, "All authority has been given to me. I have a task for you. I am going to give you the ability to do it." What was their response? It says they worshiped him. They watched him ascend into heaven. They worshiped him and then they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They stayed continually at the temple, praising God. These are the guys that ran for fear. These are the guys that were locked in the Upper Room because of fear. Now Jesus actually is gone, and it sinks in. Their reaction? Joy.

It finally sunk in. It's not an earthly kingdom. It's an eternal glorious kingdom that is to come. It's not something of this world. It's of a better world. Nothing can take that away from them. Nothing can take that away from us. That's what gives us this joy. So now the guys that were behind the locked doors go to the temple and they are continually in the temple those 10 days, it tells us, praising God. They worshiped Jesus. They praised God. They viewed Jesus as God and it changed them. They weren't so afraid about being arrested. All they were concerned about is where their eyes were focused, on Jesus.

When you and I don't focus on our fears, when we focus on our Savior and the gifts he has given us of the Spirit, of peace, of joy, of purpose, we can do incredible things. Even though we are frail, frail human beings, we can do incredible things. We can share the message that changes people from an eternity in the torments of hell to an eternity in the joys of heaven. God does that through you. That's incredible. That's amazing.

If you want a ritual that's worth celebrating day after day after day, isn't that it? Praising God by telling others who he is and what he has done for them? I love cake, but this beats cake all to pieces.