

## Luke 24:44-53

Ascension Eve + May 9, 2018  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
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Ascended Indeed

The Word of the Lord from Luke 24: "While [Jesus] blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven." This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear hearers in Christ, He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Let's try this: Dear hearers in Christ, Christ is ascended! He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!

Christ your Lord is ascended into heaven, and so tomorrow is the Festival of the Ascension of our Lord. We tend to overlook this holy day, in part because it takes place every year on a Thursday (the fortieth day after Easter). But there's another reason why: perhaps we don't realize how good the Ascension is for us. Perhaps we see it only as the *end* of Jesus' walking among us, rather than the *beginning* of something else. Perhaps we dwell on the truth that Jesus departed *from* earth, but not that He departed *to* heaven.

Ah, but there is much comfort and joy for you here, so let's see what our Lord has to say in our Gospel lesson for tonight.

Jesus says to His disciples, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." In part, this is a further assurance to you that Jesus is in fact the Christ. He's not a fake who got lucky and fulfilled a prophecy or two so that people mistook Him for the Lord's anointed. He has fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies – He is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. There is no doubt that Jesus is your Savior.

But there is more good news there: if all the Scriptures have been fulfilled, then salvation is accomplished. This is a joyful confirmation of Jesus' weary cry on the cross, "It is finished." Christ has accomplished your salvation – there is nothing left for you to do, so you need never wonder if you have done enough. You're saved because the victory is won, and because Jesus shares the victory with you. Jesus doesn't tell the disciples, "I've done My part for your redemption, so now here's the list of things that you have to do." He tells them instead that all has been accomplished. All that is left to be done is what Scripture declares is left for the future – namely, that someday Jesus will return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus also tells His disciples, "I am sending the promise of My Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." When Jesus ascends into heaven, He doesn't do so in order to take a break and devote His time to the hobbies He set aside to be your Savior. He tells the disciples that He ascends into heaven to send them power from on high. But if we're going to properly rejoice in this, we need to talk about a couple of other joys.

For one thing, Jesus has ascended into heaven to sit at God's right hand and intercede for us: as St. John says, "We have an *advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Or as St. Paul triumphantly declares in Romans 8:33-34, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is *interceding* for us." In ancient courts, the seat at the judge's right was for the defense attorney, advocate for the accused. Jesus is ascended into heaven to plead your case before His Father, and what an advocate! Imagine the conversation, the "hearing," going like this between the Judge and your Advocate, who also happen to be the Father and the Son. The Son

says to His Father, "Your Honor, no matter what sins my client is accused of – and no matter what sins he is guilty of, I have already borne those sins to the cross and I have suffered the sentence for them. Because You poured out Your wrath on Me, You must find My client innocent."

That's a convincing argument, but now check out the Judge's response: "Of course!" He declares. "Of course I find him innocent, because You, My beloved Son, have already shed Your blood and died for him. I have no wrath left for your client: his execution was carried out on Calvary with You as the substitute, and You've joined him to Your sacrifice in baptism. So rather than sentence him to eternal death, I give to him eternal life."

That's the work of Jesus, your Advocate, ascended into heaven. Long before you stand before the throne, the Advocate and the Judge have already worked together so that you might be pardoned, forgiven and have eternal life – and know it is so even now.

Hebrews gives us another image of the ascended Jesus: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (Heb. 4:14). As our advocate, Jesus is also our high priest who stands before His Father in heaven. In the Old Testament, the high priest was the only one who could enter the temple and step into the Most Holy Place, where God dwelled on earth. He would enter only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and he would be sure to carry with him the blood of a sacrificed animal to present to the Lord. Because the sacrifice was made and because the blood was presented, God declared that the people of Israel were forgiven for their sins.

Jesus is our high priest, says Hebrews. In His ascension, He has passed through the heavens and entered the Most Holy Place of heaven – not once a year, but always. He declares to His Father that the sacrifice for your sin has been made, and that the blood has been shed: His own sacrifice, His own blood. His sacrifice covers all your sin forever; and as the Sacrifice who is risen from the dead, your High Priest constantly testifies that you are cleansed and forgiven. Seeing and hearing your high priest, your Father in heaven delights to accept the sacrifice: He joyfully declares, "Amen: let it be so."

With Jesus as your advocate and high priest, it's certain that the Lord looks upon you with favor. Therefore, it's a great joy that He is also the sender. He promised the disciples that He would send power from on high – He was speaking of the Holy Spirit, whom He delivered to them at Pentecost. Jesus sends the same Holy Spirit to you: in your baptism, you are born again by water and the Spirit, and the Spirit continues to sanctify you by the Lord's Word and the Lord's Supper throughout your life. Why does the Spirit keep doing this? Because the Father and the Son keep sending Him to dwell in us. The triune God continues to keep you alive in the faith now, so you might dwell in His glory forever. In fact, by the work of the Holy Spirit, the ascended Christ, enthroned in heaven, is never far away: He is as near to you as His Word and His sacraments.

One more bit of good news before we go: We hear of Jesus' ascension as Luke writes, "While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven." When Jesus ascended into heaven, He took His body with Him – *all* of Him ascended into heaven. Jesus dwells in heaven, body and all; and so He assures you that you will be in heaven, body and all. He has redeemed the *all* of you, not just your spirit or your soul. You – all of you – will be in heaven, because you are fully redeemed; and in heaven, fully freed from sin for the first time, you will be unimaginably better and more glorious forever.

No wonder the apostles returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and no wonder they continually blessed God. No wonder they rejoiced, and were even willing to suffer, so that they might speak of repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all who would hear.

That joy is yours too, because Christ is ascended for you. Joy can be difficult to find though, for the devil will work hard to distract you with worry, trouble, anxiety, grief and despair. But remember:

Christ who died for you is risen and ascended for you, and rules over all things for your good. No matter what the evil one might whisper, you are the Lord's and nothing can separate you from Him.

With that in mind, I close with one of my favorite quotes from Martin Luther as he reflects on the Ascension:

My Lord Jesus Christ is Lord over death, Satan, sin, righteousness, body, life, foes and friends. What shall I fear? For while my enemies stand before my very door and plan to slay me, my faith reasons thus: Christ is ascended into heaven and become Lord over all creatures, hence my enemies, too, must be subject to Him and thus it is not in their power to do me harm. I challenge them to raise a finger against me or to injure a hair of my head against the will of my Lord Jesus Christ... If my Lord so wills that they, mine enemies slay me, blessed am I; I gladly depart. Thus you will see that He is ascended into heaven, not to remain in indifference, but to exercise dominion; and all for our good, to afford us comfort and joy. (Church Postil, 1st Sermon for Ascension Day, ¶27, 3:192)

Oh, rejoice! Christ is ascended for you to be your advocate and high priest. He continually intercedes on your behalf; and so Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all agreed that you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen