

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fifth Sunday after Easter, May 9, 2010**

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Hymns: 213, 217:1, 212, 216, 212:7.

Lessons: Psalm 8, Ephesians 1:16-23, Luke 24: 44-52.

Sermon Text: Acts 1:1-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I think you know what the meaning of the Ascension is. In the life of Christ, this is one of the four most important events, and yet it doesn't seem that important to many Christians. Somehow, church isn't always quite full to celebrate the Ascension. The creed that you just recited reminds us that HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN AND SITTETH AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY; FROM THENCE HE SHALL COME TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.

St. Paul, writing to the Philippians, lets us in on what this is all about: *“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* Philippians 2:9-11 and then Paul reminds us that *“for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”* Philippians 2:13.

This is why tonight we joyfully celebrate the fact that

**JESUS ASCENDS INTO HEAVEN**

- 1. He's leaving but he has left us promises.**
- 2. He's leaving but he has given us work to do.**
- 3. He's leaving but he has promised us he will come back.**

The day that Jesus ascends into heaven marks the return of Jesus to full glory. We could say as one writer did that at his ascension “Jesus picked up the crown of king of the universe.” All heaven must have celebrated as he returned to the power, majesty, splendor, and honor that is rightfully His. He had set it aside when he took on the job of paying for our sins, beginning with His conception and birth and going all the way to the cross, there dying for our sins and guilt.

Forty days earlier the disciples were gathered in sadness and fear. Their master had been executed. They had seen him put into the grave.

But then they got word that the grave was empty, and that angels had said he had risen from the dead. The resurrection really had an impact on the disciples. Do you remember how sad they were, how hopeless, fearful, ready to give up? The resurrection of Jesus on the day we call Easter took all that sadness away. But there was still a problem when they DID see Jesus. You saw it right away when Mary Magdalene grabbed hold of Jesus' feet and did not want to let him go. Thomas had some of it in him when he said that he wanted to put his fingers in the nailprints in Jesus' hands and put his hand in the hole in Jesus' side that was made by the spear after his death. They wanted to see him, to touch him, to hold him, to not ever let him go! And Easter made that feeling

all the more intense. Now they knew he was the Savior, the Son of God. Now, more than ever they did not want to let Him out of their sight!

Well, just think about that for a moment. How important would the actual appearance of Jesus be? What would happen if we announced to the newspapers and the TV media every day next week that Jesus Christ would be here in person? Wouldn't you – and other people – want to be here? Wouldn't people want to cancel golf games, trips to Disneyworld, late night out Saturday night, trips to the lake and whatever else that people who claim to be God's people let come between their worship of Him and their hearts? But it would have a bigger impact than that! Even if the national media would make a mockery of all this in reporting it, you could still figure on crowds in the thousands, and if it were presented by the media as serious, there would be millions trying to come here.

Jesus was on earth for 40 days after his resurrection. But he was going in and out of glory. He passed through walls, he appeared, disappeared, and even perhaps, changed appearance somewhat.

That was all to let the disciples know that something very big was happening. It started on the cross when that gigantic payment for the world's sins was paid. We are talking here about things on a scale we cannot comprehend. The resurrection signaled that Christ was the Savior, and that he was also true God, in control of everything, even showing that he had power over death and hell.

And now, the ascension signals that everything Jesus had come to do on this earth was completed. That includes sacrificing His life, but it also includes the telling to the disciples and to the world that He was who he said he was, true God and the only hope for this world, for you and me and all the other people in the world. He is the only hope any human has of living forever.

Now it is time for Jesus' work to enter a new phase, operating totally from glory. There would be no more visible appearances again until the final one, when he returns in that glory and splendor at the end of time as Judge over all the world. Ascension was the last of Jesus' resurrection appearances.

And now all the promises of Jesus made sense: Promises like SURELY, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS! FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE COME TOGETHER IN MY NAME, THERE AM I WITH THEM. MY PRESENCE WILL GO WITH YOU, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST. THIS IS MY BODY, THIS IS MY BLOOD. And even the promises in our text: *“For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”* Acts 1:5. And another one: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* Acts 1:8.

St. Luke writes in our gospel in this evening's lesson: *“When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.”* Luke 24:50-53. Notice the celebration! Not wild drunken celebration, but celebrations of worship and joy! They finally realized that this was the last time they would see Jesus on this earth, but that there would never be a time when he would not see them nor would there ever be a time again when they could not talk to Him in prayer, knowing full well that he was listening just as intently as he listened to their last questions before He ascended to his heavenly throne at the right hand of God, a position of power and honor and glory. Instead of clinging to Him, instead of being fearful and confused and upset when He ascended, they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And their joyful worship just kept on. There was excitement because Jesus ascended, and the gloom of Good Friday night was history.

But they had something else to celebrate. He's leaving but he left them work to do. He told them ***"you will be my witnesses."*** And that surely started immediately, as they told others about what had happened. Especially on Pentecost, ten days from now, you will see how they told others about Jesus and what he had done. And to this very day Jesus' followers are Jesus' witnesses, telling others the truth about Jesus. It is exciting when you tell me specific incidents that show how you and your children are witnesses for Christ.

Just like those disciples who saw him bodily ascend into heaven – no trickery, no magic, no special effects – you have work to do. They were to be ***"witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*** You don't have to rush off to India or Africa or Saudi Arabia or Somalia or Rome to witness to what Jesus Christ did for you. There are Hindus, Buddhists, and Moslems right here. There are many who claim the name "Christian" right here in our communities who do not know that Jesus Christ died for ALL their sins. Jesus' disciples were to be witnesses first right where they were, in Jerusalem. Then in Judea, a somewhat friendly neighboring area, then in Samaria, an enemy territory right next to where they lived, and finally, to the ends of the earth. So, you, too, have work to do: right here where you are today, and in the next town, and wherever God should send you for whatever reason. You can tell the love of Jesus, you can say he died for all. And perhaps more importantly, your life can tell that you are a child of God. Your lives and how you behave have a tremendous message about what you believe. As a Christian, you, too, are horrified at the advertising of a large vacation city which says "what happens here, stays here", with the implication that you can be as wicked as you want – when you are away from home – and no one will know! But your life, your actions, your behavior often speak far louder than any words you could say. We are often surprised by meeting someone who recognizes us even when we are far from home. In 2003 when my wife and I spent a week in Mexico we were wearing t-shirts identifying us as Mankato State University Swimming and Diving parents with our last name printed on them – our son was at a college swim meet that week – and someone in the Cancun, Mexico airport from Mankato recognized us, someone whom my wife knew personally!

Jesus ascends into heaven, but he has promised us he will come back. For example, we read in John 14:2-3 ***"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."*** (King James Version)

He will come! And we know that he will come to judge the living and the dead, and take me and all believers to be with him to the eternal mansions!

Jesus' ascension into heaven does not mean we are left hopeless, helpless, and alone. It means he is with us in a different way. He has promised and given the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit has given us the entire and complete Word of God for our learning, for our comfort, for our rebuking one another's sins, for our correction, for thorough instruction in righteousness.

Hallelujah! Jesus has ascended into heaven! Celebrate with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving! Amen.