

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Ascension Day, May 9, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 218:1-5, 218:6, 222, 223, 219:1-3.
Lessons: Lessons: Psalm 8, Acts 1:1-11, Luke 24:29-53.
Sermon Text: Ephesians 1:16-23
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When we celebrate the ascension of Jesus into heaven, we usually concentrate on Jesus actually ascending into heaven. Today, let's talk about Jesus' immeasurably great power especially now that he has ascended into heaven. Let's remind ourselves of

THE INCOMPARABLE POWER OF GOD

- 1. God's power is obvious, and should be obvious even to unbelievers.**
- 2. Jesus, now ascended into heaven, has all this power.**
- 3. It is a power which Christ shares with the Church.**

Paul is praying to "*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father,*" asking and thanking him for all he has done and will do for his readers. This is the Father who has all power and glory, as we acknowledge in the doxology of the Lord's Prayer. "For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever." Paul is praying for the Ephesian Christians so that they may especially come to know and be assured of the hope to which God has called them, and the great value of their inheritance of eternal life and God's incomparably great power. "*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*" Today we are only going to look at the great power of God.

We read about, hear about, and see God's power in many, many ways. From his holy Word we hear of his grand power, as you heard again today in our sermon text.

But everyone can also see God's power in all that God created, from the times you look up into the stars on a clear evening to the tiniest of cells and atoms and subatomic particles. God created all that by the power of his Word!

However, mankind in his feeble wisdom has come up with various theories of how all things began. Right now one of the most prominent is called the "Big Bang" theory. Man's theories suggest that the universe is constantly expanding from some kind of explosion at its very beginning. However, man's theories do not provide any explanation for the actual beginning of the universe but tend to describe and explain the general evolution of the universe going forward from that point on. And our new space telescopes look into the far reaches of the universe God created and let mankind conclude that the universe is so and so many billions of years old. To me that seems pretty pretensions, considering that humans today only live to be, at most, just a few years older than 100. Many people believe such theories but have no explanation for the beginning of such a universe.

Creating all things that exist obviously would have required a tremendous amount of power. Yet many reject God's Biblical statements of creation, which God not only did but also recorded for us in detail for each of the six days of creation. God created all things by the power of his Word: "let there be, and there was." In addition, God speaks and causes to be written of creation elsewhere in the Bible in enough detail with no contradictions whatsoever throughout the Holy Scriptures.

Other examples of God's power include the great flood when ***"In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month--on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened."*** (Genesis 7:11) What power! Water from the sky and from under the earth! Many of the results of that great flood are used to supposedly "prove" theories of evolution – particularly layers in rock believed to be millions or even billions of years old. What power God exerted in that great flood which covered all the earth!

We could point to other examples of God's power, such as the act of breathing life into a lump of dust. ***"The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."*** (Genesis 2:7) Humanly speaking, it is impossible to make a living, breathing human being out of dirt. And we don't even know what color of dirt God used!

But when it comes to power, we dare not forget God's ***"incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms."***

This was done ***"for us who believe."*** It was done for you, who have been brought to faith by the working of the Holy Spirit! God exercised his incomparable power just for you, so you might live eternally!

Look at God's power ***"which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead!"*** God brought a dead human being to life! That's like making a rock alive! But God's power did it and he showed it first to his closest followers and then revealed it for the entire world through his Word, the Bible.

Today, 40 days after Jesus' resurrection, we celebrate the day Jesus ascended into heaven and God ***"seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms."*** In almost every worship service we confess this in one of the two creeds: he ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

Today you heard again about that miracle when Jesus ascended bodily into heaven. He was really alive, body and soul, not just a spirit made visible, but a live human with a real body who was talking, eating, and drinking. It was that living person, true God and true man, who was taken up into heaven.

In our epistle lesson you heard of that event after he told his followers that they would be his witnesses unto the ends of the earth. ***"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."*** (Acts 1:9)

Paul here refers to that same powerful event, when God ***"seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."***

All earthly rule and authority and power and dominion is less than, is weaker than the power of God in Christ Jesus. When we think of rule and authority, we might think of earthly power such as the leader of a country might have. People in Ephesus in Paul's day might have thought of the power of the Roman empire, starting with the great Caesar in Rome and being asserted all the way down to the Roman soldiers they could see in their city. After all, this is the letter in which Paul uses the picture of a Roman foot soldier and tells the Christian to put on the full armor of God: ***"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."*** (Ephesians 6:10-11 NIV)

In addition to ***"rule and authority"*** Paul piles up the words to show how much greater God's power is than any human power. He goes on to speak of all ***"power and dominion, and every title that can be given."*** This should have the believer's jaw dropping – "you mean more power than all humans?"

Paul expands the scope of any power that anyone could think of. Christ is sitting ***"in the heavenly realms, far above"*** any and every power man can imagine. And it doesn't just endure for this temporal, earthly world or age. It will continue forever. Christ's power is greater than the greatest power in this age, in this world or in the entire universe!

I remember times as a child when we used to kind of argue about who or what was stronger. You might think about what you had heard about the comic book character Superman: "Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound." And we'd all try to think of something stronger than what the other person was talking about. Maybe that's a poor example. But my point is the tremendously great power of God which he exerted – worked – and the Greek word here is the root of the English word "energy", which God exerted in Christ.

Let me give you another example of God's power. Stronger expressions could hardly be found in human language to bring out the absolute inability of man to do anything toward his conversion and salvation. Our conversion was made possible by the surpassing greatness of God's power alone, as it was revealed toward us, and exerted itself in our hearts and minds. That we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior was made possible only by the power of God's almighty strength. It is like it is power on top of power on top of power.

God the Father placed all things under Christ's feet, just as he promised to David's Lord in Psalm 110:1: ***"Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."*** Jesus himself assured us of this at the end of Matthew's Gospel where he himself tells us ***"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*** (Matthew 28:18, NIV84) ***"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."*** (Matthew 28:18, KJV)

By his resurrection and 40 days later ascending to the right hand of power Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power, having the same greatness and might and honor as the Father. This reference to the next-to-the last stage or step of Christ's state of exaltation surely shows Christ's power. The last stage or step is Christ coming to judge the living and the dead.

By setting Christ at his right hand in the heavens, God the Father has put all things under his feet, and has given him, also according to his human nature, the complete dominion, not only over all power and authority in the physical world, but also over all the spirits of heaven, over the angels with their superhuman strength and power. No matter how important any created being in this world and in the world to come may be, the power and authority of Christ is greater. Christ is the supreme Lord, far greater than anything he created, as you heard in our Old Testament lesson.

Far more important for us now is Christ's position in the Kingdom of Grace. God gave his only-begotten Son to be the Head over everything and everyone to the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Notice how God zeroes in on you as a believer, a part of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints! In his capacity as Head over all things God has given Christ as a present to the Church, which is his body. You are actually part of the body of Christ. We also think of the Lord's Supper, in which we are taking into our body the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, who gave that body and blood to assure us of our salvation.

Jesus Christ is the head – your head – your ruler, your leader, your master exerting all power over everything for you! ***"And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."***

With such a great head – Jesus – with all this power, what have we to fear? We are part of his body, he is our head, our guide, our strength. And he assures us in John 14 he will come again. He said ***"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."*** (John 14:2-3, KJV)

Later in this letter Paul reminds us of God's grace in saving us, contrasting our sinful state with the love of God in Christ. We read in the next chapter: ***"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."*** (Ephesians 2:1-7)

Thank you, Lord, for making us part of that glorious kingdom of power and preserving us unto eternal life! Amen.

Revised from a Ministry By Mail sermon for May 14, 2015.