

## Don't Forget! Remember the Ascension

As you read these words, the altar paraments are still white, the church remains in the brightness of the Easter season. That's because the Church takes her time – a full 50 days – to celebrate the resurrection of her Lord in this special season of joy. *He is risen*, and the life we now live, *we live* in Him [present tense!].

However, as May ends, Christians around the world will celebrate another great day – the *Ascension of our Lord* (Luke 24:50-53) – by counting 40 days after Easter. It is easy to push the Ascension aside as “not Christmas, not Easter, and not Sunday,” and since Ascension ALWAYS falls on a middle-of-the-week *Thursday*. When we busy ourselves with “other things,” we crowd out any thought of He who “was crucified, died and was buried. Descended into hell. Rose again from the dead. And has now **ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father.**”

And yet the Ascension of our Lord (**which we'll observe this year with Divine Service on Thursday, May 30<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm**) is truly the “icing on the cake” of the life of Christ and for the Christian. In sinful ignorance we may well get (and give!) the impression that Jesus is somehow *gone*, that He “went away, up to heaven,” and now – *away* from us – just sits back in all of His power and glory to watch as we struggle on earth. Let us say most emphatically: **This is not true!**

Martin Luther said of the Ascension: “*We must therefore, conceive of His ascension and Lordship as something active, energetic and continuous... Had he remained upon the earth in visible form, before the people, He could not have worked so effectively [as He now does...] for the Ascension made it possible for Him to be in touch with all and reign in all, to preach to all and be heard by all, and to be with all. Beware lest you imagine within yourself that He has gone, and now is far away from us. The very opposite is true: WHILE*

***HE WAS ON EARTH HE WAS FAR AWAY: NOW HE IS VERY NEAR.***” (emphasis mine)

What does this mean? We are left with this mind-boggling paradox: that Jesus, in His flesh and blood (just like ours!) is able to have rule and dominion over all things; be *everywhere* at one time [!]; sits in the heavens, yet is ever here on earth with His Church on earth as true God and [still!] true Man. His “visible” presence is removed until He “comes to judge the living and the dead,” but His real bodily presence remains among us. And this is everything!

Jesus has not “re-located” as though the “right hand of God” is a *place* to where one goes. No, as Luther rightly maintained, “the right hand of God... is *everywhere*.” Your risen and living Savior is all over at all times, no longer bound (as in His state of humiliation) to one place and one time. He has united heaven and earth! Indeed, He has brought heaven to earth in His own flesh! He, as a man, our Brother, has opened heaven for us and is still present (as true God and true Man) with us who are still bound by time and space. And He exercises His gracious rule in His Church for you in this way: by His Word and Sacraments.

Think on this. The Lord of the univers... can be “grasped” by us earth-bound mortals... in His ministry of preaching, Bath, and Supper. Right where *He* says.

The Ascension brings this wonderful “God-with-us.” God-STILL-in-the-flesh perspective of our *Risen and Ascended* Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our fallen human reason is limited, and all the more dangerous because of sin (we *think* we are smarter than we *are*!) We want to be able to “understand” these high and holy mysteries of God, yet mere human reason cannot fully take in or grasp this eternal power of God. God, and His Word of promise are so wondrously high “above me” and yet He locates it all right here, for me.

Human reason spits and sputters about this, and says: “No, No! Christ is NOT here. Can’t be! He ascended. Away. So, He cannot be present in this bread and wine and word!” But God’s Word says that Christ has ascended, as He says, precisely “to be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20), that “where two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I among them” (Mt 18:20), and points us even more precisely to His altar to *eat and drink*: “My Body... My Blood” (Mt 26:26, 28). The Risen and Ascended Lord... for you! Always. And where He promises.

Pastor Peter Cage

# *Ascension*

Thursday, May 30

7:00 pm

