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Ascension of Our Lord
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Text: Acts 1:1 – 11
Title: What's the Big Deal?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In the 2000 year history of the Christian Church there are 7 events that the Church has often considered to be primary events or High Festivals to celebrate. If I'm remembering it correctly, the list is made up of Christmas, Epiphany, Pentecost, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, and Ascension Day. Many Christians today would be surprised to know that Ascension Day falls in this list. With all of the distractions in life, Ascension Day has sadly become a forgotten festival in a majority of Christian congregations throughout our society. It just doesn't seem to be all that big of a deal, especially in the middle of a typically busy Spring week.

But with so much going on in the world around us, is it any wonder that we might ignore the spectacular events in God's Word, especially ones that get repeated year after year? We're bored by things that get repeated to us, and we end up asking ourselves, "What's the big deal?" to something like the Ascension of our Lord. What does that really matter for your life? There are so many things that you have to worry about, why should you care about something that happened almost 2000 years ago? All you need to know is that Jesus loves you, right?

Yes, it's true. "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," is a simple enough statement of the Christian faith. Salvation comes from just that smallest iota of faith in Jesus Christ, but that's what the book of Hebrews would call spiritual milk. It's enough for a baby sized faith to survive on, but your faith grows and matures. Your faith needs solid spiritual food to continue to grow and mature. Faith needs to feed on the meat of God's Word in order to get

its nourishment, and that means learning about the fullness of the work of God, particularly in the cross of Jesus the Christ.

The Ascension of Jesus is part of the work of God whether we realize it or not. Forty days after Jesus rose from the grave, He met with the disciples one final time. They were sure that the time had finally come for Him to drive out the Romans and restore the kingdom to Israel, and you can't blame them for wondering if this was finally the right time. After witnessing Jesus rising from the grave, restoring Israel to its former glory must have seemed like child's play to them, but Jesus makes it clear that the time of the fulfillment will only come according to the Father's plan. When Jesus was done speaking, He rose into the sky, and while everyone was watching, He went into a cloud and was not seen again.

So, what's the big deal? Even the two men in white robes who appear to the disciples after Jesus is gone didn't seem to think that this was anything to get excited over. They ask why they're looking up into heaven, and they tell the disciples that Jesus will return the same way that He left them. Although they don't say it, their words are a reminder that there is still much work to be done.

Although it only takes up a few verses in the Biblical accounts, the Ascension of Jesus is one more important part of the entire life of the Savior. Jesus is not just rising into heaven on this day, but He is taking His place at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is fully beginning His reign as the King of kings, His humiliation is over, His exaltation is beginning, and as He takes His rightful place His coronation occurs. We can only imagine what happened when the Son of God entered into the gates of heaven, but the armies of angels and the saints who had gone before had to make one incredible welcoming committee! Make no mistake about it, Christ's arrival in the heavenly throne room was a very big deal!

You and I want to join with the disciples as they keep their gaze on the heavens. We want to focus on His glory, and forget about everything else. But that's not what Jesus wants us to do, and that's not how God has chosen to deal with us and reveal Himself to us. Instead He has chosen the cross. The cross in all of its gore and cruelty and agony and suffering is the way that Jesus accomplished His work. That's why we still keep the crucifix as a symbol of the Christian faith because to see Jesus on the cross is to see Him doing His work for us.

It's much easier and prettier to focus on Jesus as He is glorified, but it's His cross that brings salvation. We want to look at Him and see a clean and perfect person who was never affected by sin because then we don't have to face the suffering He went through for us. But if the Lord was going to save us through His glory, then Jesus would not have needed to come to the world in such a state of humiliation. But your sin is ugly, and before God it is especially so. Your sin leaves you separated from God. It breaks you and makes you an enemy of your Creator. Only the Son of God could restore you by living a life that was completely without sin, and only a life without sin could be offered as a perfect sacrifice for your sins and mine. His cross with all of its blood and pain and suffering is the only reason that the curse of the Law is lifted from you, and that cross He endured because your sins and mine required it.

Because of His willingness to endure that cross for us, it has become the ultimate symbol of victory for all Christians. Without the pain and suffering of the cross He would not have made full payment for your sins, and He would not have risen from the grave to defeat death. Without the humiliation that He suffered on the cross, the Lord's exaltation as He Ascended into heaven would have been no big deal. Now He reigns on the throne at the right hand of His Father for this millennium period, and when the Father says that the time has come, He will restore the kingdom to Israel, which is today's Christian church. That day will be the ultimate victory as the

bodies of the dead rise again to eternal life with Him, and then we will be able to revel in the full glory of Christ Jesus.

But that day isn't here yet, and you and I have work to do until it arrives. Jesus left His earth with these words, "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." That's why the disciples were not allowed to remain there looking up into the heavens for Jesus. The words of the two men in white broke them from their reverie, and reminded them that Jesus didn't want them or us to just sit there and look for Him to return. It will happen when it happens, and until it does you and I are to use the power that the Holy Spirit has given to each and every one of us to spread the message of the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Until His return, the Lord Jesus reigns on high even as He remains with us in His Word and in His Sacraments. At the same time, the Holy Spirit maintains His Church and adds to it when and where He chooses as He sends us out to proclaim to the entire world before, during and after the Easter season that Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!