

Sunday, May 24, 2020, Ascension of Our Lord
From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church, Pembroke, ON

Welcome to all who are gathered together by Christ our Lord in ways that are mysterious and wonderful this day. He, who was lifted up, shall draw all people to himself, so that wherever our Risen Lord is, we shall be also.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Amen.**

Let us pray:

Almighty God, your blessed Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, ascended far above all that he might fill all things. Mercifully give us faith to trust that, as he promised, he abides with us on earth to the end of time, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

First Reading: A reading from Acts 1: 8 – 11

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Second Reading: A reading from Ephesians 1: 15 – 23

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Gospel: The holy gospel according to Luke 24: 44 – 53
Jesus said to the eleven and those with them, “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, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power on high.”

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Homily:

The story of the Ascension is one of the most mysterious of all in the Christian's faith. The great mystery of the Ascension is that Jesus had to leave us so that he could be more fully with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit could only come to us if it was given by the Risen Ascended Lord and our Heavenly Father. The Nicene Creed boldly proclaims this as the faith of the early church. Without the Ascension, there would have been no Pentecost. When Jesus returned with the Holy Spirit, it was indeed a great and glorious return, full of power and majesty, just as was promised to the disciples.

Notice how the disciples respond to the Ascension of our Lord. They stand staring at the sky, completely overwhelmed by what they had just seen. It was more than their minds could fathom.

Fortunately, some sassy angels show up and tell them to stop staring at the sky and remember what Jesus had just told them. He will return, and will be with them again, in ways beyond their imagining.

It is no surprise that the disciples carefully listened to the angels' words that day and followed their advice. They knew enough about the stories of their faith not to mess with angels...they have a habit of getting their way. Just ask Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist... or Mary... or the Shepherds on Christmas Eve. When angels speak, you listen carefully and you respond with haste. So the disciples did as were asked, and went away

together to a quiet and secluded place to wait for Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were not just faithful, they were wise.

It was a time of patient waiting and expectation as they watched for the fulfillment of Christ's promise to return in power and glory. Notice the disciples did nothing else but worship and pray for the ten days between the Ascension and Pentecost. No great missionary journeys, no great works or miracles. They simply waited for the grace of God to unfold as promised.

I am not certain how they managed to do that. The disciples were a very diverse and somewhat contentious bunch. Peter was a bit impulsive and John could be fairly self-righteous at times, because he seriously believed that Jesus loved him more than the rest. And then there were James and John, who were a little needy, insecure and power hungry.

How did they worship and pray together continuously, for ten days? I get anxious if the Sunday celebration goes over an hour. Yet, we are told that is what they did. Some would say they appeared to be doing nothing, but perhaps they were doing what mattered most.

We have this notion that what we do as Christians defines us. But perhaps what really defines us is that we are gathered together as God's children in praise of the God who loves us...and maybe that is the most important aspect of our lives...and everything we do flows from that, empowered by the Spirit of God, led by Christ, cajoled by angels along the way.

So we are gathered together in many and various ways and places on these days between Ascension and Pentecost, to joyfully listen to God's word and Christ's promises and we are

blessed indeed in this holy season, hidden away for awhile perhaps, but never forgotten and never abandoned by God.

Prayers of the Faithful:

Gracious and tender-hearted God, we live in troubled times. Hold us in your mercy and comfort us in our fear and our worries. Gather us together in heart and mind and lead us by your Holy Spirit. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the Church during this time when we must be apart from each other. Bless all we do as we strive to be faithful, even when what we do seems clumsy and inadequate. Help us remember that we shall see each other again in your presence and that our hearts will once again be filled with joy. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our world, troubled by illness, plagued with fear and despair. Grant wisdom and skill to all who work on vaccinations and treatments, and watch over those who are ill and those who care for the sick. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our loved ones who we cannot be with us this Easter season. We pray for all in our parish who are mourning and all who are ill, or troubled in body, mind, or spirit. Grant them healing and peace. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things, and whatever else you see that we need, grant us, gracious God.

Gathering all our prayers into one, we pray the prayer that you have taught us: Our Father, who art in Heaven...

Blessing:

May our Gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us in the Risen Life of Christ our Lord.

