

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD
May 24, 2020

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

DIVINE SERVICE ONE



THE ENTRANCE RITE

PRELUDE *Processia Nova* Setting: Kenneth L. DeJong

WELCOME

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

ENTRANCE HYMN #821 *Alleluia! Sing to Jesus*

**1 Alleluia! Sing to Jesus;
His the scepter, His the throne;
Alleluia! His the triumph,
His the victory alone.
Hark! The songs of peaceful Zion
Thunder like a mighty flood:
“Jesus out of ev’ry nation
Has redeemed us by His blood.”**

**2 Alleluia! Not as orphans
Are we left in sorrow now;
Alleluia! He is near us;
Faith believes, nor questions how.
Though the cloud from sight received Him
When the forty days were o’er,
Shall our hearts forget His promise:
“I am with you evermore”?**

**3 Alleluia! Bread of heaven,
Here on earth our food, our stay;
Alleluia! Here the sinful
Flee to You from day to day.
Intercessor, Friend of sinners,
Earth’s Redeemer, hear our plea
Where the songs of all the sinless
Sweep across the crystal sea.**

**4 Alleluia! King eternal,
Lord omnipotent we own;
Alleluia! Born of Mary,
Earth Your footstool, heav’n Your throne.
As within the veil You entered,
Robed in flesh, our great High Priest,
Here on earth both priest and victim
In the eucharistic feast.**

**5 Alleluia! Sing to Jesus;
His the scepter, His the throne;
Alleluia! His the triumph,
His the victory alone.
Hark! The songs of peaceful Zion
Thunder like a mighty flood:
“Jesus out of ev’ry nation
Has redeemed us by His blood.”**

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Silence for reflection on God's Word and for self-examination.

Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name.

Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ

Amen.

KYRIE

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Power, riches, wisdom and strength, and honor, blessing, and glory are His.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation.

Blessing, honor, glory, and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

For the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign. Alleluia.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. O King of Glory,

Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON Acts 1:1-11

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But 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 end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 68:1-10

O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God;
sing praises to the Lord.
God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered;
and those who hate him shall flee before him!
As smoke is driven away, so you shall drive them away;
as wax melts before fire, so the wicked shall perish before God!
But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before God;
they shall be jubilant with joy!
Sing to God, sing praises to his name;
lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts;
his name is the LORD; exult before him!
Father of the fatherless and protector of widows
is God in his holy habitation.
God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
but the rebellious dwell in a parched land.
O God, when you went out before your people,
when you marched through the wilderness,
the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai,
before God, the God of Israel.
Rain in abundance, O God, you shed abroad;
you restored your inheritance as it languished;
your flock found a dwelling in it;
in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy. (ESV)

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON 1 Peter 3:18–22

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

Alleluia.

Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL John 17:1–11

The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 17th chapter

Glory to You, O Lord.

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. (ESV)

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Text: Acts 1:1-11; 1 Peter 3:18-22; John 17:1-11

Dear friends in Christ:

The Gospel lesson just read is the first section of a long prayer of Jesus, one which he uttered in the presence of his disciples right before his betrayal and arrest. In this prayer, Jesus prays for his disciples—specifically that they be kept in the Father’s name and that they be one. Jesus prays this prayer with great urgency since he knows his time with them is short. Included in the prayer are his words to the Father: “I am coming to you.”

Today is the day in the church year when we remember Jesus’ return to the Father. Jesus returned by ascending into heaven. We read about that glorious vision of Jesus being lifted up into the skies in our first reading today, from the Book of Acts.

Our second reading today, from First Peter, also mentions the Ascension of Jesus. Peter tells of it at the end of a very unique paragraph, in which things like spirits in prison, Noah, Baptism and the resurrection are also mentioned – one right after another. In reading this paragraph, one wonders whether Peter may have taken a longer sermon and just cut it down to the very basics—quickly stringing together the main thoughts for the sake of space.

Whatever the case, let’s spend some time unpacking his message. The paragraph comes in the context of Peter addressing the subject of unjust suffering. You may have noticed over the past weeks, as we have read different portions of Peter’s letter, that this theme has been repeated a few times now.

This time, after again encouraging endurance, Peter brings up the example of Jesus' suffering. Notice, however, that he doesn't elaborate on the suffering itself. Rather, the topic becomes an occasion for Peter to tell us what Jesus did to "bring us to God." That was the point of the suffering. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."

We should stop here and think about what it means that we need to be brought to God. According to the Biblical message, we cannot get to God on our own. There is a gulf between us. That gulf is created by our sin. We who are unrighteous cannot approach the One who is righteous. We need to be brought to him. There's a journey we need to take if we are to be with him.

Thankfully, Jesus brings us to God. He is our Savior. He bridges the gulf. Peter tells us how he does this. But Peter does his telling in a unique way. He does it by describing the journey Jesus took. Peter could have quickly summarized this journey of Jesus by saying: "Jesus died and rose again." That would have been sufficient. But Peter has mentioned these events already in his letter. This time he tells us some different details of the journey. And what a journey it is! As he tells the story, Peter makes some connections for us too.

Peter presents the exceptional and extraordinary nature of Jesus' movements by bracketing this section with the same Greek form of the verb for "having gone" (*poreuomai*). He uses the word to describe both Jesus' descent in v.19 and his ascent in v.22. By doing this, Peter expresses the continuity of Jesus' movements. Everything is intentional. And everything is different once Jesus has risen from the dead.

The Gospels document well Jesus' glorified nature after he rises. He walks through walls. He appears and disappears. Some people don't recognize him. Here, Peter says that Jesus was "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit." As the resurrected Christ, Jesus traverses space and time in a form incomprehensible to human logic.

As such, he is able to go and "proclaim to the spirits in prison" that he is alive. He descended into hell, as we say in the Creed, to show hell that it has no victory. He "put them to open shame," as Paul tells the Colossians (2:15), "disarming the rulers and authorities by triumphing over them." When Peter mentions the spirits in prison, he takes us back to that time when humanity was at its worst. This is the time described for us in the early chapters of Genesis. There we read about a rapid decline of humanity, with an eventual description in chapter six of a humanity where "every inclination of the people's hearts was only evil all of the time."

Genesis tells us that God's patience with the people wore out, and that he sent the flood to wipe out his creation. But God also had mercy on his creation, because of one man, Noah, who found favor in his eyes. Because of Noah, eight persons – Noah and his family – were brought safely through the water.

After making this connection, Peter then describes a similar journey that you and I have made. We, too, were brought safely through water one day – the day we were baptized. In the waters of baptism, our old sinful self was put to death and a new person arose. Through the waters of baptism, we were brought to God by Jesus, who made an appeal to God on our behalf, for a good conscience. Through Baptism, we journeyed with Jesus in his death and resurrection so that we might be joined to the Father.

Having made this connection for us, Peter then completes the journey of Jesus. He tells us that "having gone (there's that verb again) into heaven," Jesus is now "at the right hand of God." There he reigns and rules with the Father, "with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."

As we today think about this incredible journey of Jesus, and specifically about his ascension, we should make some notes about what this means for us.

First, we should be clear that the ascension of Jesus does not mean that he is no longer with us, but rather that he is glorified—in presence, in status and in purpose. In his glorified state, Jesus traverses space and time in a form incomprehensible to human logic. He does this to keep his promise that he would be with us always to the end of the age. He does this as he gives us the Holy Spirit. He does this whenever two or three gather in his name.

And, Jesus also comes to us in his glorified state via the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We recall how Jesus said that the bread and cup are his body and blood. And we take Jesus at his word, being grateful that he is so close to us in this Sacrament.

As I write this sermon, it has been two months since I've taken Holy Communion – the longest stretch in my life since I've been a communicant. I have decided not to commune until we are publicly offering it at St. Paul's once again. I do this in solidarity with you, my brothers and sisters, during this time of the pandemic where it has been unsafe for us to gather.

Now, however, our country is beginning to open. People are starting to gather. Restrictions are being loosened. Life must go on. But what about Holy Communion?

Some who are quoted in the news say quite simply that Holy Communion is unsafe. But do they understand that safety measures can be taken? We do not need to drink from the exact same cup. We do not need to kneel at a common altar rail. We can receive the elements from our pastors if they wear a mask and avoid touch.

As an alternative, some prescribe a Communion that can be done over the internet, or given in pre-packaged containers, or done as some kind of ritual for us to simply watch. These methods are put forth as attempts to eliminate all risk, as if the essence of Holy Communion did not involve any risk.

I remind you that when Paul instructed the Corinthian church about Holy Communion, he began by saying "when you gather." And he repeated that phrase two more times. Communion is about gathering. And gathering involves risks. In fact, Paul mentions some. Things like the hard feelings and fracturing which come when some partake on their own. Or when some are left out. Or when some get drunk. Or when some don't examine themselves. Or when some don't discern the body.

I know it may seem like there is a difference between risking these things and risking physical illness. But if you continue reading Paul's instructions, you will see that he mentions physical illness as an outcome of improper communion. Hard feelings and fracturing can lead to ill health too. There is damage done when we don't commune according to the Lord's instruction.

The church may at times need to suspend Communion. But it should be a temporary suspension only. We need this gift of the Lord. When our government leaders tell us we can gather in our churches, we should open our doors. We should offer services as safely as we can and do so even if some are not yet ready to attend. We can't always wait for everyone. We should offer Holy Communion for those who can come and offer it without pressure or compulsion.

Let me just say one more thing about the Christian life during this time of the pandemic. We may not have been able to gather at the church, but many of you have been gathered with the people in your homes more in the past months than you've probably been gathered in a long time. If ever. And this has given you the opportunity to step up your spiritual leadership. You haven't been able to come to the church to be blessed by the leadership of our pastors and our teachers, our cantor and our youth director, our encouragers and our people who set such a good example for us. But you have been able to teach and encourage one another. Parents have been able to lead their children in Bible reading and worship. Spouses, siblings and friends have been able to encourage one another in spiritual devotion. New opportunities for leadership have arisen, and I know many of you have answered the call.

We need the Christian faith in our homes, not just in our churches. Some day soon you will journey to the church, and there you will be blessed by Christ's presence in the profound way you know it to be. But Jesus can bring you to God in your home as well. His presence can be with you as you hear his words. His salvation can be made new again as you remember your baptism.

As we endure this time of distancing, and as we think about the next steps and prepare to go on, may the journey of Jesus – who descended into our world to bring us to God, and who now lives and reigns in glory – inspire you in your journey. And may he keep you in faith until the day of his return. Amen.

**1 Up through endless ranks of angels,
Cries of triumph in His ears,
To His heav'nly throne ascending,
Having vanquished all their fears,
Christ looks down upon His faithful,
Leaving them in happy tears.**

**2 Death-destroying, life-restoring,
Proven equal to our need,
Now for us before the Father
As our brother intercede;
Flesh that for our world was wounded,
Living, for the wounded plead!**

**3 To our lives of wanton wand'ring
Send Your Spirit, promised guide;
Through our lives of fear and failure
With Your pow'r and love abide;
Welcome us, as You were welcomed,
To an endless Eastertide.**

**4 Alleluia, alleluia!
Oh, to breathe the Spirit's grace!
Alleluia, alleluia!
Oh, to see the Father's face!
Alleluia, alleluia!
Oh, to feel the Son's embrace!**

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of the trumpet. Ascended Lord, hear the prayers of Your people and grant our supplication. *Brief silence*

That the Lord may grant us all things in Christ so we maybe strengthened in weakness and delivered from trouble, and that this pandemic come to an end, and that livelihood and common life may resume, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Church of Christ may flourish and the good news of Christ crucified, risen and ascended would be proclaimed to the ends of the earth, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord richly supply us with faithful pastors, church workers and lay leaders who will proclaim the Word in season and out; and that we may hear, believe and live the Gospel, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the nations of the earth may seek peace; and that the leaders of our country may guardd the weak, punish wrongdoing and seek peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That all who are afflicted may be strengthened in illness and comforted in adversity, [*especially* _____,] let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord may grant us joyful hearts and peace at the last, knowing that neither death nor life, nor any powers, can separate us from the love of God in Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That we may be generous in our tithes and offerings as the Lord is in giving His gifts, and that we may support all those in need, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That we may know the Lord's presence in the means of His grace, hearing His Word, receiving His absolution and feasting at His table, and that we would bear much fruit, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That we may remember the saints of old, especially St Constantine and Queen Esther, and that their witness would encourage and sustain us, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

All these things and whatever else we need, we ask You to grant us for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.
The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.
The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #525 Crown Him with Many Crowns

**1 Crown Him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark how the heav'nly anthem drowns
All music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
Of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless king
Through all eternity.**

**2 Crown Him the virgin's Son,
The God incarnate born,
Whose arm those crimson trophies won
Which now His brow adorn:
Fruit of the mystic rose,
Yet of that rose the stem,
The root whence mercy ever flows,
The babe of Bethlehem.**

**3 Crown Him the Lord of love.
Behold His hands and side,
Rich wounds, yet visible above,
In beauty glorified.
No angels in the sky
Can fully bear that sight,
But downward bend their wond'ring eyes
At mysteries so bright.**

**4 Crown Him the Lord of life,
Who triumphed o'er the grave
And rose victorious in the strife
For those He came to save.
His glories now we sing,
Who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring
And lives that death may die.**

**5 Crown Him the Lord of heav'n,
Enthroned in worlds above,
Crown Him the king to whom is giv'n
The wondrous name of Love.
Crown Him with many crowns
As thrones before Him fall;
Crown Him, ye kings, with many crowns,
For He is king of all.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE Carillon Cortege Setting: J. Wayne Kerr

Acknowledgments

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