

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD (observed)  
THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
MAY 16, 2021

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



PRELUDE *Up through Endless Ranks of Angels* Setting: William Braun

WELCOME

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

ENTRANCE HYMN #491 *Up through Endless Ranks of Angels*

**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!**

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we come into the Lord's presence on this day, it is right for us to examine our lives in light of the will of God, to confess our sins, and to ask for God's forgiveness. We do this in the sure and certain hope that God will keep His promise and give us the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation for the sake of Jesus Christ. Let us then take time to recall the ways we have failed to uphold God's Law this week and confess these sins to Him.

*(We observe a moment of silence for self-reflection.)*

Most merciful God,

**We confess our inability to be faithful in our promises to you and to walk in the way of Christ. We have neglected to serve others and have sought our own well-being rather than good for all. Acknowledging our sin, we look to you for mercy and healing. Strengthen our faith, increase our hope, and guide us in the path of humble service. 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.**

#### *THIS IS THE FEAST*

**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. Almighty God,  
**as Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also  
ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him, who lives and reigns with You 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."

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*PSALM 47*

Clap your hands, all peoples!  
Shout to God with loud songs of joy!  
For the LORD, the Most High, is to be feared,  
a great king over all the earth.  
He subdued peoples under us,  
and nations under our feet.  
He chose our heritage for us,  
the pride of Jacob whom he loves.  
God has gone up with a shout,  
the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.  
Sing praises to God, sing praises!  
Sing praises to our King, sing praises!  
For God is the King of all the earth;  
sing praises with a psalm!  
God reigns over the nations;  
God sits on his holy throne.  
The princes of the peoples gather  
as the people of the God of Abraham.  
For the shields of the earth belong to God;  
he is highly exalted!

**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* Ephesians 1:15-23

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked 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 one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

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 17:11b-19

The Holy Gospel according to St. John the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter

**Glory to You, O Lord.**

[Jesus said:] "Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to You, O Christ.**

*SERMON*

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ:

Today we are remembering the Ascension of Jesus – that lifting up and disappearance of his into heaven that took place forty days after his resurrection. We celebrate, through readings, hymns and prayers, this sign of his continued living and glorious reign with the Father.

In addition to the Ascension, we are also remembering on this day words of Jesus that the Church assigns for the last Sunday of the Easter season. These words are a portion of his prayer for the disciples as recorded in John 17 – the prayer known as his High Priestly Prayer. This prayer will be the main focus of today's sermon.

When we look at the prayer, we are first of all reminded of Jesus' great love and care for his followers, since he is praying specifically for them. The prayer was offered at a time when Jesus had just finished a long discourse to the disciples – one where he taught them many things, including much that was meant to help form them into a family of faith. The prayer was offered as Jesus was preparing to give himself in death and return to the Father. It thus has a tone of urgency and shows both Jesus' heart for his followers and his concern for them.

Since this prayer has been recorded for us by St. John, who was there to hear the prayer and was guided by the Holy Spirit in his writing, we are also to see this prayer as an example for our own prayer. We are to note that for which Jesus prayed and how he prayed for it. Examining Jesus' prayer will lead us to grow in our understanding of prayer and help us develop a heart like his.

This year we read from the middle portion of the prayer. The first thing to note about this portion is that Jesus highlights his two main requests by starting each of them with the same word. In v. 11, Jesus asks the Father to "keep" his disciples in his name. In v. 15 Jesus asks the Father to "keep" them from the evil one. These two requests get to the root concerns of Jesus and give us the starting points for understanding this part of his prayer.

And just so you know, some translations will substitute the words "guard" or "protect" for the word "keep." And those word choices certainly reflect much of Jesus' intention here. But the word is most literally translated "keep," and this reminds us that Jesus has already done much to help his disciples. They are in a good place. All is well. They just need to be kept there.

When Jesus asks his Father to "keep the disciples in your name," he is asking God to keep them in the faith which they have been taught. This includes both the teaching of the Old Testament scriptures and the things Jesus has taught them. Jesus' words harken back to the First and Second Commandments, where God speaks to the power and holiness of his name. We all know how honoring it is to others when we know their name. So also, with God. When we say his name – thoughtfully, reverently, respectfully – we are acknowledging his place in our heart.

Jesus asks that his disciples be kept in God's name, and then adds the words: "which you have given me." In fact, he says this twice. In these words, Jesus is claiming something very remarkable. He's saying that God's name has been given to him. And by this, he's not simply saying that he knows God's name, for they all know God's name. Jesus is saying that he has a unity with the Father. That they are one in being. Note the comparison Jesus is making here between the unity he and the Father have and the unity he wishes for his followers. He wants his followers to be one, just as he and the Father are one.

St. Paul also makes this connection between Jesus and the Father by lifting up the holiness of Jesus' name. He mentioned it to the Ephesians, as we heard in our second reading today. And he mentioned it also to the Philippians when he explained that Jesus has been given: "the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

Jesus, in his years of ministry, had already by this time given many indicators of his equality with the Father. But these words in his prayer are further clarification as to his true identity.

Still, the main thing we are to notice in this prayer is the need Jesus articulates. Jesus knows that his disciples will be tempted to leave their faith when things get difficult, so he prays earnestly that the Father will keep them in their faith. They will need the Father's help.

As we see from the prayer, essential to their being kept in faith is their unity. Jesus mentions this specifically – both here and in other sections of the prayer. Unity is critical. For if the disciples are divided, they won't be as strong.

At the same time, however, this unity is a secondary concern. The Lutheran commentator R.C.H. Lenski, for one, makes a compelling case for this understanding. The chief aim is the keeping in faith of each disciple.

I mention this because the church has always wrestled with the goal of unity – both what it should look like and how important it should be. We know that, on the one hand, we are united already through the same Holy Spirit. The scriptures make this clear. There is one church. We confess this in the Creed when we describe the church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. On the other hand, we are also very divided – in doctrine, practice, organization... and many other ways as well.

Many Christians over the centuries have pushed for church unity by encouraging compromise in doctrine and practice. Endless proposals like this have in fact been put forward, but they mostly meet with only limited success. That's because in this very prayer of Jesus, where he prays for unity among his people, Jesus also prays that they would be sanctified in the truth. A truth is not to be compromised.

I have found over the years, as I have gotten older, that I am less concerned than I once was about the unity of the whole church. I still pray for it. But I also feel that perhaps God the Father, by allowing some diversity, is achieving his greater goal of keeping people in the faith. The unity I cherish most these days is a healthy respect for other Christians and a cooperation in matters that don't compromise beliefs.

Moving on to the second request of Jesus in the prayer, we see that Jesus also prays to the Father that his people would be kept from the evil one. And just so you know, the original language does not have that last word – "one." Jesus prays that his people would be kept from the evil.

It's very possible that the word "one" is implied here. Many scholars think so. Why else would the definite article be there? But it's also possible that Jesus wants us to think about the evils that come from other sources too. In the Lord's Prayer, where the definite article is also found, we simply pray: "deliver us from evil."

Right before Jesus prays this, he mentions the fact that the world has hated his followers. We should see this hatred as one form of evil. It is an evil that moves people to tear down the followers of Christ, or withdraw from them, or resent them. It is an evil borne sometimes from jealousy, sometimes from misunderstanding, or sometimes simple rebellion against the authority of God. It is an evil that can be very strong. It is an evil against which Christ's followers will always need to contend, even in times and places where it is not so strong.

In praying that his followers be kept from evil, Jesus immediately adds the request that his followers be sanctified in the truth. By adding this request immediately, he shows the strong connection between evil and falsehood. Jesus, we recall, once called the Devil the "Father of lies" (John 8:44). And this description by Jesus simply echoes that which had been known from the beginning, when the Devil first lied to Adam and Eve.

We should point out as well, that when Jesus speaks of truth, he doesn't just mean that we should be tellers of the truths we see. Yes, of course we should be honest. We are not to be liars. But Jesus is

urging more than this. Jesus wishes us to be sanctified – that is, made holy – by the truths which he reveals. He says to the Father: “your word is truth.” We are not made holy by our honesty. True holiness comes from knowing and believing the truths God tells us.

One of the most important truths for us to know – and the one that truly sanctifies us – is the truth that sins are forgiven by Jesus Christ. The devil would have us believe that either we have no sins or that we are lost forever in our sins. Jesus tells us we have forgiveness of sins in his name. He can say this because he paid for our sins when he died on the cross. And he knows this because he was raised from the dead, overcoming the curse which sin caused.

Earlier in his prayer, Jesus said to his Father: “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” (v.6). By God’s grace, and through their faith, Jesus’ followers had been sanctified and saved from the curse of death. Now Jesus prays that they would be kept – kept in faith and kept from evil.

And Jesus continues to pray for his followers. Which means he’s praying for you and me. As his followers, we have been saved from our sin and sanctified in God’s truth. Jesus now prays that we would be kept in faith and kept from evil. He prays that we would not turn from the faith which has brought us salvation. He prays that we would be kept in this faith together – finding strength and encouragement in unity. And he prays that we would be kept from all evil – including that evil found in the hatred of others and the evil that comes from the evil one.

On this day when we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord Jesus, let us also celebrate the fact that Jesus, seated with the Father in glory, continues to intercede for his people. I leave you with these words of St. Paul to the Romans (8:33–34): “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

All praise and glory be to our ascended Lord and Savior Jesus. He prays for his family. And we are blessed. Amen.

*HYMN OF THE DAY #539 Christ Is the World’s Redeemer*

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| <p><b>1 Christ is the world’s Redeemer,<br/>The lover of the pure,<br/>The font of heav’nly wisdom,<br/>Our trust and hope secure,<br/>The armor of His soldiers,<br/>The Lord of earth and sky,<br/>Our health while we are living,<br/>Our life when we shall die.</b></p> <p><b>2 Christ has our host surrounded<br/>With clouds of martyrs bright,<br/>Who wave their palms in triumph<br/>And fire us for the fight.<br/>Then Christ the cross ascended<br/>To save a world undone<br/>And, suff’ring for the sinful,<br/>Our full redemption won.</b></p> | <p><b>3 Down through the realm of darkness<br/>He strode in victory,<br/>And at the hour appointed<br/>He rose triumphantly.<br/>And now, to heav’n ascended,<br/>He sits upon the throne<br/>Whence He had ne’er departed,<br/>His Father’s and His own.</b></p> <p><b>4 Glory to God the Father,<br/>The unbegotten One,<br/>All honor be to Jesus,<br/>His sole-begotten Son,<br/>And to the Holy Spirit—<br/>The perfect Trinity.<br/>Let all the worlds give answer:<br/>Amen! So let it be.</b></p> |
|---|---|

## *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.**

*OFFERING Christ Is the World's Redeemer* Setting: Mark Bender

## *PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH*

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

In praise of our King who has gone up with a shout and the sound of a trumpet, ascended in triumph and seated at God's right hand, that we would ever rejoice and look forward to the day of His return in glory, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the proclamation of the Gospel, born into all the world by Christ's holy people, and that many may believe, be baptized and be saved, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That in the midst of the world's wars, terrorists and pandemic, that God would calm our fears and fix our eyes on Christ, seated at the right hand until at last He makes His enemies His footstool, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy**

For Joseph, our President, Ralph, our Governor, and all our leaders, that God would keep them from acting in selfish and unjust ways; and that God would give them wisdom to govern in accord with His good will, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the families of Paul Provance and Gladys Hane all who mourn, for all who are in recovery, and for those we name in our hearts \_\_\_\_\_ that the Lord would deliver and restore them, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord have mercy.**

For all who commune, that God would grant them in this heavenly food, forgiveness, life and salvation, and that they would rise from this feast to serve God and our neighbor with faith and life renewed, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we rejoice in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus. We join with all those who praise You in heaven, especially Cyril and all missionaries. Gather us together from the ends of the earth to celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb. Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and 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 #494 *See the Lord Ascends in Triumph*

- 1 **See, the Lord ascends in triumph;  
Conqu'ring King in royal state,  
Riding on the clouds, His chariot,  
To His heav'nly palace gate.  
Hark! The choirs of angel voices  
Joyful alleluias sing,  
And the portals high are lifted  
To receive their heav'nly King.**
- 2 **Who is this that comes in glory  
With the trump of jubilee?  
Lord of battles, God of armies,  
He has gained the victory.  
He who on the cross did suffer,  
He who from the grave arose,  
He has vanquished sin and Satan;  
He by death has crushed His foes.**
- 3 **While He lifts His hands in blessing,  
He is parted from His friends;  
While their eager eyes behold Him,  
He upon the clouds ascends.  
He who walked with God and pleased Him,  
Preaching truth and doom to come,  
He, our Enoch, is translated  
To His everlasting home.**
- 4 **Now our heav'nly Aaron enters  
With His blood within the veil;  
Joshua now is come to Canaan,  
And the kings before Him quail.  
Now He plants the tribes of Israel  
In their promised resting place;  
Now our great Elijah offers  
Double portion of His grace.**
- 5 **He has raised our human nature  
On the clouds to God's right hand;  
There we sit in heav'nly places,  
There with Him in glory stand.  
Jesus reigns, adored by angels;  
Man with God is on the throne.  
By our mighty Lord's ascension  
We by faith behold our own.**

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### DISMISSAL

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

### POSTLUDE *See, the Lord Ascend in Triumph* Setting: Mark Sedio

Altar Flowers: By Ian and Kristen C.

### Acknowledgments

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