

Ascension means “everything”!

Service Intro:

Sometimes God’s gift of *Ascension* gets treated like the macaroni art project we gave our parents in the first grade. On the one hand, without a doubt, it’s a gift from the heart. Maybe not of DaVinci distinction, but edible glue and uncooked noodles took effort and intention. And we meant it, with all of our heart, as we affixed that wheat to card-stock, or as we strung yarn through edible tubes. It’s something special; intentionally made to give to someone we love.

Not at all difficult to realize that in today’s celebration observation, either. In a marvelous way, Ascension displays God’s heart for his Creation, it vivifies assurance for us who need it daily. A blessing to live under, a promise affixed to our hearts, a golden thread of grace to bind us to him.

But we’re not quite sure what to do with it. Like that macaroni masterpiece, we keep around for a bit; we post on the fridge door of our minds for our minute but, then what? It’s not really shellac-able – to be preserved like Christmas or Easter, right? It’s not frame-worthy to be placed on the mantle for the generations like Baptism or the Lord’s Supper, right? It’s not all that practical or able to be employed in some unique way like other of Jesus’ teachings, right?!

For now I’ll leave those questions unanswered by me. But I do with this prayer: that, as we hear and sing and celebrate our Savior’s ascension, the Spirit of Grace works on our hearts to help us understand *Ascension means “everything.”* It’s a beautiful gift from the heart of a gracious God, 100% meant to adorn the mantle of our hearts and be put to use in our everyday life. God helps us see it and celebrate it that way today and always!

Luke 24:44-53

⁴⁴ He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them.

⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Maybe because our hearts always need forgiveness and, in a sin-rotten world, we crave some semblance of peace; but it's interesting how quickly we limit the Savior to a sacrifice. To be sure, he is that. He's the suffering Servant who carried all sin, and bore all its consequences; the despised Substitute who took our place so that in him, and by him, and from him we might have the harmony of heart, the release of guilt, the peace we crave. And we need that. Every day.

But, in his own, special way, Jesus reminds us he's not *just* a Servant, or *just* a Substitute. And, on a day like today, it's vital we realize that *Ascension means "everything!"*

Take in that truth again from Luke 24:44: "*He said to them, 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.'*" Literally: "*it is necessary for the all of "that" to arrive at the goal.*"

Everything! Serpent-Head-Crusher (Genesis 3). Fulfilled. Ruling Lion from Judah (Genesis 49). Ruling still. David's forever-reigning son (II Samuel 7). On the throne. The God-and-human relationship restorer (II Corinthians 5). The Friend of sinners and forgiver of sinners. Clear. The Love of God made manifest. Accomplished. The eternal I AM who is with you always. Faithful. God who ascends amid shouts of joy (Psalm 47:5), the Risen who ascends to heaven before human eyes as Savior and Substitute and Sacrifice and Sovereign. Completely.

That's still who he is – the God who still holds up his hands and blesses his people! So gladly so, *Ascension means "everything,"* everything that is written about him is true; and, because it is, every day in our life and right here, right now *A Hymn of Glory Let us Sing (CW 171)!*

Acts 1:1-11

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

There's a dangerous mentality inside every sinful heart. It's an approach that turns religion into a cafeteria with a buffet of "selective doctrine." A theory one can settle up to Christianity and pick-and-choose what's like-able and dismiss-able; a spirituality that loads up on spiritual desserts and by-passes spiritual vegetables. *"I'll take forgiveness, but neglect what God says about living in sin; I'll take heaven, but set aside what Jesus says about the Way there; I'll take what Jesus calls us, but forsake what Jesus calls us to do."* Here's why that's dangerous: because it limits Christ and, by extension then, limits Christ's commission. It totally negates the fullness of why he came, the completeness of what he calls each of us to be and to do, in him.

But how well Jesus knows hearts! Even as he – the resurrected, living Lord; who hung around 40 days after he rose, and *"showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive"* (Acts 1:3) – how well Jesus knows our hearts! Glance again, he doesn't just *show* for those who were there and could see and not for us who weren't or can't; he speaks to them and to us! Words of promises that dispel doubt (Matthew 28:18-20). Words of power that instill a happy wait (Acts 1:5). Words of proxy that send his Word to the world for which he came, to share with that world everything he came to be and to do and to win and to secure and to give.

Ascension means "everything!" Everything we get to know about our Jesus; and everything we get to make known about our Jesus. And that's what Jesus calls us to live and do. To witness! Not just his words about sin; not only his words about forgiveness. Not just his Law; not only his gospel. Not just the things people want to hear, but also the things we need to, too. Not just what Jesus did; but also – thrillingly – what he still does and what he promises to do! All of it!

How well the Bread of Life places a spiritual and eternal buffet before our hearts – not to pick and choose, but to enjoy all of it! How graciously he allows to feast! And that's why we continue: *A Hymn of Glory Let us Sing* (CW 171:4-6).

Ephesians 1:18-23

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Don't mean to be cocky, but I'm very good at keeping Jesus in the past tense. Jesus came. Jesus lived. Jesus forgave. Jesus died. Jesus rose. Jesus proved. Jesus ascended. Jesus promised.

Maybe I should say it this way: I'm sinfully good and keeping Jesus in the past tense. As I live bothered by the world around, I think: what would Jesus do if he were here? As I live frustrated by the way things seem, I think: if Jesus actually stood by my side, the consternation would stop – because he authority and control would be evident. As I live fraught (which means “over-freighted, over-loaded) with all the unknowns, I think: has my God forgotten, has it slipped his attention, did it get out of his control? Why do I live as if Heaven's Heir took his rightful throne to inactively do nothing more?

But remember, Ascension doesn't mean “nothing;” *Ascension means “everything!”* In it, God in heaven did not give us some impractical Kraft-noodle craft without meaning or assurance to everyday life. Instead, in it, God's heart of grace reminds, assures of what our God, our Jesus, our King Eternal, still does. Not “ascended to do nothing;” instead, ascended to rule everything!

Ascension means everything! It means that our Jesus has kept his promises. All of them. Is with us. Always. Everywhere. Is enthroned in heaven, is in control. Over all. Through all. Throughout all. For us. It means the One who is head over everything is the One who goes with you every-where; who stands at your side every-day; who knows and cares for your every-thing; who rules in control of every-when. Yours. Mine. All. Today. Tomorrow. Eternally.

Christians, that's the gift, that's the glory of Ascension. That's the blessing the Spirit of Grace applies to your hearts, the umbrella of blessing under which you get to take every step and breathe every breath knowing, and assured that our Jesus, our Ascended Lord is King of all and King for you! And the day is coming when he will bring us to our home with him. Promise!

That's our joy. That's our confidence. That's hope and our motivation because our King is *crowned with many crowns* (CW 341). Please stand as we adore and acclaim the King of Kings!

Alleluia and Amen!