

Rev. David R. Solum  
The Ascension of Our Lord  
May 21, 2020  
Immanuel Lutheran, Michigan City  
Acts 1:1-11; Eph. 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

To our audience listening on 95.9 WEFM; to those watching on our YouTube channel “Immanuel’s Friends;” and to those here present: Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, God’s own Son; and from the comforter, the Holy Spirit; who together are one God, now and forever. Amen.

I am so happy to have to opportunity today to preach about the Ascension to a much wider audience than usual! That sounds strange to those of us who are here in the sanctuary since we have a lower physical attendance. But because of this pandemic (and I do not say this lightly, knowing that many people are suffering greatly out there)...nevertheless...because of this pandemic, we have the opportunity to preach the Gospel to more people than ever during a time when peace and comfort are especially needed. And the Gospel gives that peace which surpasses all understanding, greater than all the comforts of this world combined.

I am especially happy to preach to you this Ascension Day, since, it is one of the most neglected Church festivals, and yet, one of the most important, right up there with Christmas and Easter. That is why we at Immanuel celebrate it every year. The Ascension of Our Lord is especially important now to learn and understand so that we can have sufficient strength, hope, and comfort to navigate these challenging times.

When you were going through some terrible crisis, and in your pain and despair, has someone ever offered these words to console you, “It’s okay; God is in control”? Did it feel a little less than comforting? Now, for those who might have in their mind the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ and can easily draw all the theological conclusions from that statement might have some comfort. But this statement alone can be more troubling than anything. Nothing I am experiencing is okay! If God is in control, why is this happening to me? Why does God cause or allow evil? Why hasn’t God rescued me yet? Where is God in my suffering? Sometimes we Christians, though well meaning, can fail in our comfort because we’ve forgotten to mention the central teaching of the Gospel: the cross of Jesus Christ. We assume, especially with those who are already Christians, that they don’t need to hear the Gospel because they already know it. But we forget that the Gospel isn’t just information; it is the power of God to comfort us and give us faith.

What if I told you instead that the God who is “in control,” who rules over every power in heaven and on earth is the One who, while we were still sinners and deserved nothing but eternal punishment, took on the mortal weakness of human flesh, suffered humiliation and mockery, beatings and torn flesh, nails driven through His hands and feet while suffering the flames of hell, and died because He loved you and wanted to save you from all evil, including this one? This is the God who is in control. The God who died for you and is risen victorious is in control. Surely *this* God will not want this evil to overwhelm you and destroy you. On the contrary, the God who turned a bloody cross into something beautiful for our life and salvation, can turn this evil into good and use it for His saving work. As it says in Romans 8:28, “For those who love God all things work together for good.” God will also not let this evil remain, but as surely as

He is risen from the dead, He will rescue you from it. As it says in Romans 8:37, “We are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us,” and also, “Christ must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Because Christ, who died for us, has ascended to the right hand of God the Father, He has all the power and authority to work for our good while we live on this earth, to use trials to make us stronger in life and faith, and to defend us from evil. He graciously looks after us, is with us in trouble and will not allow the powers of sin, death, and the devil master us so that we are separated from our God and utterly destroyed.

Because Christ is ascended and stands before the Father in heaven, He intercedes for us. As it says in Romans 8:31-34, “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? 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 is indeed interceding for us.” Can then coronavirus or joblessness and poverty or depression or persecution or death or devil separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ? Not while Christ, the Son of God, is crowned in heaven and intercedes for us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Therefore, we can joyfully, with every confidence, call upon the Father in prayer and know that He must hear us and answer us with His gracious love, as surely as He must answer His own beloved Son Jesus Christ.

Christ, who is in control, has ascended to give gifts to us. Ephesians 4:7-8 says, “Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore, it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.’” and also a little later, “He who descended is the one who also ascended far above the heavens, that He might fill all things.” When Christ still with the disciples on earth, He, in His humanity, was only present in one place at one time. He walked and travelled with them; He came and left. But when Christ ascended into heaven, He filled the universe with His presence so that He would graciously help His people wherever they are on earth. He sends helpers in the form of family, friends, church members, doctors, emergency workers, grocery workers, farmers, and the list can go on and on of those whose vocations God has created in order to help us.

Not only is Christ present in our neighbor who helps us, but also in His church where we receive the means of grace for our salvation. Thus, Christ promises through His preachers of the Word, “Whoever hears you hears me” in Luke 10:16, and also, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them” (John 21). It is not as though the preachers themselves have any power over sin whatsoever, but that Christ does and He is truly present in their teaching and preaching, forgiving sins. Thus, Christ also says in Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them.” Christ is truly and fully present with salvation wherever Christians are gathered around His Word and Sacraments.

Because Christ is ascended, He is present with His very body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine in His Supper. When Christ ascended, He ascended in glory. The attributes of His divinity, the qualities that Jesus possesses because He is God, are transferred to His

humanity. Ordinary human bodies cannot be in more than one place at one time. They cannot go through walls. But Christ's human body, risen and glorified by His divine power, can. This is how, during the resurrection appearances, Jesus walked through locked doors to reach His disciples. And the same Christ promises in Matthew 26, "This is My body; This is My blood...for the forgiveness of sins...Do this in remembrance of me." He has given us this special meal in which we can be sure that Christ has not abandoned us in our sufferings nor has He forgotten us, but is truly present to save us.

We are told that Holy Communion is also a foretaste of the heavenly feast which we will enjoy in the life to come. The angel said to the Evangelist John in Revelation 19, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." In this Holy Supper we have fellowship with heaven and are reminded that Christ and His whole heavenly host are on our side fighting for us and strengthening us for the battles ahead, until we partake of the feast in glory. That's why we sing before Communion the song of the angels in heaven, which both John and Isaiah witnessed around the throne, singing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty."

This all reminds us that our earthly life may be short and full of trouble, but Christ has prepared a place for us in heaven, a place without pandemics and flooding and disaster, sin and death, and the afflictions and temptations of the devil. Because Christ has risen from the death and ascended into heaven, we know that we will be lifted out of the grave and ascend to the heavenly kingdom which has no end. Had Christ not ascended, we'd have no hope that we would do likewise and we'd be forced to live in anxious toil and fear of our death.

Christ will indeed return, as He has promised. This pandemic reminds us that the world indeed will not last long. It is a dying world we live in. We made it that way because of our sin. But Christ who conquered sin will come back to earth in glory, to judge the living and the dead. The time is now for us to repent and to seek His grace. For those who do not will suffer eternal hell. But for those who turn from sin and live in Christ's forgiveness, they will be raised with incorruptible bodies. They will shine like Christ and reflect His glory and reign with Him in heaven forever and ever.

We don't have all the answers as to why God does certain things or allows particular trials to come to particular people. Just as Jesus told the disciples that it wasn't given for them to know the times and the seasons, we are not given access to the hidden mind of God. But we go to what we do know about Christ and His kingdom and find comfort there.

We know that this pandemic is NOT the new normal. Christ our Savior reigns, therefore it is a temporary little affliction. It is already conquered by Christ and destroyed of power. Think about it. The worst it can possibly do is take you to heaven. And it will end along with all the world's evil at the return of Christ. Let us sing and shout for joy. Christ is risen! Christ is ascended! And He will come again in glory! We are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ. Alleluia! Amen.