

“Crown Him the Lord of Love”

Acts 1:1-11, Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD – JUNE 1, 2014

You probably know by now that St. Luke is not only the author of the third book that appears in the New Testament, **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LUKE**, but he is also the author of the fifth book that appears in the New Testament entitled—**THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**. In his **first book**—Luke tells us about the **life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**. In his second book, Luke tells us about the **birth of the Christian Church and** the great growth it experienced under the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit.

In the Book of Acts, before immediately rushing into the account of our Lord’s ascension, however, Luke wants to review some important truths about the life and ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with every one of us!

FIRST, THERE IS THE IMPORTANT FACT OF THE RESURRECTION ITSELF.

Just as St. Paul tells the Corinthians that everything we believe as Christians depends upon the historical reality of Jesus actually being resurrected up from the dead out of that very empty grave that first Easter morning, so St. Luke (a close friend and a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul’s) reiterates this same truth here! **“To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during the forty days!”**

SECONDLY, LUKE REPEATS FOR US THE IMPORTANT COMMAND that Jesus gave to his disciples at the end of his Gospel account (Luke 24:49)—**THAT THEY ARE TO REMAIN IN JERUSALEM UNTIL THEY RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (ACTS 1:4).** “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!’”(Acts 2:4-5) Only then would they be fully empowered to carry out their mission.

THIRDLY, OUR TEXT EMPHASIZES THE FACT THAT THERE IS A GOAL OUT THERE AHEAD OF THE CHURCH, TOWARD WHICH WE JOURNEY.

The apostles have come to realize that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and the long-awaited Davidic Messiah of Israel. This means that Christ has begun to exercise the reign (r-e-i-g-n) of God on earth; the kingdom has begun to break into our human space and time. **But still there is** some lingering confusion in their hearts and minds **at this point. Even after all that has happened, they are looking for Jesus to become an earthly ruler, and to** restore the nation of Israel to its former status of being a major superpower again in this world **the way that it was 1000 years before this during the reign of King David.**

Unfortunately, these disciples were not privy to the conversation that Jesus had with Pontius Pilate just hours before his crucifixion. **Pilate asked our Lord, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world!”** (John 18:33-36)

The question these disciples wanted Jesus to answer for them is not unlike the question many people may still wish that Jesus would answer for them today, concerning our belief in his Second Coming; a belief

that all Christians profess our faith every time we confess the Apostles and Nicene Creeds: “From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead” (AC). “And he will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end” (NC)

Though the question today is somewhat different than the question that Jesus’ first disciples were asking him on this fortieth day after Easter, the answers to these questions are remarkably similar. In our first lesson today you heard Jesus say in Acts 1:7: “It is not for you to know!” And according to Mark 13:32, with respect to his Second Coming in glory, we read Jesus’ words: “Of that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father!”

Having said this, our text continues to tell us in Act 1:9, “And when he said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight!”

THE FOURTH EMPHASIS IS THE FACT THAT THE CRUCIFIED AND RISEN LORD JESUS CHRIST HAS NOW ASCENDED BACK INTO HEAVEN TO BE WITH THE FATHER ONCE MORE, TO RESUME HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE IN GLORY AT THE FATHER’S RIGHT HAND.

The Son of God lived there as the Pre-Incarnate Son of God, before he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. But now, when he as the **Son of God resumes his rightful place in heaven, he does so as both God and man, as divine and human.** The implication of all this is that Christ now reigns at the right hand of power as Lord over all the earth. Certainly, **the account of the Ascension of our Lord is incomprehensible** to us, especially as those who consider ourselves living in a very scientific and enlightened age. **Certainly “heaven” is not just up there, immediately above the clouds,** and just beyond the ozone layer that envelopes our planet, **but still we have a tendency to think of it this way because we are finite human creatures completely bound by space and time; and the only way we can really think as mortal human beings,** is only in terms of spatial categories.

One thing the ascension affirms for us is that the realm of God is totally other than our merely human realm—that it is another world which our five human senses of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling will never really be able to penetrate—a realm which can only become knowledgeable to us by faith; faith that God creates in our hearts by the gift of his grace through the Gospel.

Oh, I do believe, that there may be times, when the Spirit of God will lift our spirits momentarily out of this world into that other realm—something that is most likely to happen—when we are genuinely, purposefully and authentically worshiping our God; so that we may even sense at times, as St. Paul did occasionally, that we are standing here among God’s redeemed people, destined for glory, with one foot here on earth and the other foot already there in heaven. But this sense and this experience is given to us only through God’s gift to us of our faith.

St. Paul was writing about himself, in a spirit of true humility, when he one day wrote to his friends at Corinth, “I know of a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows! And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from

being too elated. Three times I pleased with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me!” (2 Corinthians 12:3-9)

The principle fact of which the ascension assures us, however, is that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is no longer limited by the same kind of mortal, physical body, in which he lived while among us for those 33 years in what theologians call his state of humiliation. Nor is he limited by geography, able only to be at one place at one time, the way that we still are, most of us are, to a large degree; though modern technology gives us the advantages of seeming to be at more than one place at one time, through the use of the Internet and Skype communication modes, etc.

Our great statement of faith today, if we are genuinely celebrating the Ascension of our Lord, is that Jesus our Savior reigns now as Lord over all of creation throughout all eternity.

It is interesting that Jesus’ first disciples on that first Ascension Day were as mystified by Christ’s disappearance into heaven as we are (Acts 1:10). They stand gazing upwards, wondering—what in the world has just taken place! But two angels clothed in white ask them why they are just standing there gazing up into the sky (v. 11).

Christ is ascended. This is no time to be standing around. He will come again. But in the meantime, they must wait for the proper empowerment of the Holy Spirit before they could ever know what, or when, or how to do, whatever it is that they should know what, when, or how to do next!

In the meantime, they will have to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them. And then, somehow, miraculously, convincingly, enthusiastically, excitably, courageously, methodically, purposefully, intentionally, and boldly, they are to go out into every known corner of the world to witness to everyone they can—to all that God has done for us as human beings in the life, death and resurrection of his only-begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

We might say that this text in Acts furnishes us with the bedrock of our life in the church. It affirms that Jesus Christ is arisen from the dead and has now ascended into heaven as the Lord over all. It warns us against idle speculation about when he will come again in glory, accompanied by the heavenly hosts who will journey here with him. **Nevertheless, the true celebration of the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, reminds us that our life of faith is not simply to be limited to the mere matter of our coming to have our sins fully forgiven by God and then returning home and going about our normal business. No. We have work to do. Christ has appointed us as the witnesses to what God has done for all people throughout the world. But we cannot carry out that witness on our own, any more than Jesus’ first disciples could.**

No matter how small or big the congregation is that we are members of, no matter how financially well off our congregation may be, or poverty-stricken, our celebration of the Ascension of our Lord today will only reach its highest pinnacle when we finally admit, acknowledge, and profess to God and one another, that we do not have either the ability or strength within ourselves to accomplish on our own anything that God is still calling upon us to do. **We are to be dependent upon God’s Spirit if we are ever to be or become what he has called upon us to be and to become; and who it is that he has chosen us to be. And this realization leads us to the question that we should always be willing to explore anew: Have we been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, or not? In the meantime, we have no greater purpose in our worship than to “Crown him the Lord of heaven, enthroned in worlds above, crown him the king to whom is given 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!"

Do you catch my drift, deep down in your innermost persons, my brothers and sisters?

To crown him the Lord of love is for us to genuinely believe with every fiber of our being with which our God has indeed entrusted us—that the One who was despised, forsaken and rejected; the One who was beaten, bruised, wounded; the One who was crowned with thorns and mocked with a purple robe; the One who was crucified, dead, and buried; the One who was raised from the dead; the One who in the awe-struck sight of his disciples ascended into heaven has been crowned as King of kings and Lord of lords.

In his ascension, he was crowned the Lord of heaven and enthroned in worlds above. At last, once and for all, he was crowned the King of all. He had come in poverty and lived in sacrifice, but now he was returning to the glory and majesty, the power and kingship that had been his from eternity.

He was indeed King of kings and Lord of lords. Many years later, as the Apostle Paul was writing to the Ephesians in our second lesson today, he thought of all these things, and his spirit soared and his heart rejoiced. In a moment of joyful excitement, he knew the greatness of being a Christian. Being a Christian is great because we have a great King, because he has given us great promises, included us in his great mission, and even given us a great faith—with which—to wholeheartedly, unashamedly, unapologetically, unflinchingly, unyieldingly, uncompromisingly believe that all of this is true!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen.