



Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh

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Good Shepherd Sunday

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Reformers consistently emphasized the biblical teaching that Christ's work on the Cross is complete. We can add nothing to what He accomplished through His sacrifice of Himself on our behalf. As we say in our liturgy, "He made there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world." This emphasis on the finished work of Christ on the Cross has led some to think mistakenly that Christ's work is finished altogether.

Scripture, however, clearly teaches that the work of Jesus continues. On May 10th, the Church will celebrate the Feast of the Ascension. We will add to the Easter acclamation, "Christ is risen," our foundational confession, "Jesus is Lord." Wrapped up for us in the word "Lord" are at least four key images: King, Bridegroom, Priest, and Messiah; each of which includes implicitly an invitation to us.

Jesus' ascension is an invitation to battle (along with a promise of victory and a call to submission). The essential message of the Ascension is that Jesus is exalted as King above all. Paul declares that God has "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" (Eph. 1:20-23). He also says, "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him 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" (Phil. 2:9-11). Jesus is seated as one actively commanding. Jesus "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:25,26). One of the amazing aspects of the ascension is that we are raised and seated with Jesus at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 2:4-10). We then participate in His subjugation of all that vaunts itself against God (Eph. 6:10-20; Rom. 16:20).

Jesus' ascension is an invitation to expectancy. The great news for followers of Jesus is that Jesus is not only our King, but also our Bridegroom. When Jesus ascends to the Father, He, as the Bridegroom, goes to prepare a place for His Bride, the Church, so that we can be with Him. In the Upper Room, He says to the disciples, "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2,3).

ONE CHURCH OF MIRACULOUS EXPECTATION AND MISSIONARY GRACE

Jesus' ascension is an invitation to draw near with confidence to receive help. The writer of the Book of Hebrews sees the Ascension through the lens of a High Priesthood that is better than the priesthood of Aaron in the Old Testament. The writer says, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3), and "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (4:14). The throne on which Jesus sits is the "throne of grace" (4:16), and He now "lives to make intercession" for His people (7:25).

Finally, **Jesus' ascension is an invitation to long for a renewed empowerment by the Holy Spirit** (see Luke 11: 9-13). From His throne Jesus fulfills His ministry as the Messiah. When John, the Baptist, first bears witness to Jesus, he identifies two crucial aspects of His ministry. Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. And Jesus is the One who will baptize in the Holy Spirit (John 1:29-34). In Peter's explanation to the crowd regarding what had happened at Pentecost he says, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (Acts 2:33). As Jesus is ascending He tells his disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they are "clothed in power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

As you read this letter, the Feast of the Ascension is just around the corner. Whether your congregation celebrates the Ascension on the actual day, May 10th, or on the following Sunday, I encourage you to say "Yes" to the invitations Jesus' ascension extends. Embrace the promise of victory, the call to submission, and the invitation to battle. Open your heart to expectancy. Draw near with confidence to the throne of grace to receive help in the time of need. And, finally, during the 10 days between Ascension and Pentecost, ask continually that God will empower you, and all of us, with His Spirit.

With you, rejoicing in Jesus, our Ascended and Reigning Lord,

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