

“The Ascension in Your Daily Life”

Like the disciples, we stand on the Mount of Olives with Jesus just prior to His Ascension – seeing that this Crucified One is Risen, He is alive. And our confusion is revealed by the question – “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Like them, we often operate with false notions. For them, it’s the notion that Jesus – obviously victorious over death itself, and victorious over the Romans and the religious leaders of Israel – will now flex His muscles and set up His Israel 2.0 kingdom here on earth.

Such a notion thinks it might be retribution time – get back at those who mistreated you, put them in their place, wipe them out. Take the reigns of the Temple and the governance of God’s people Israel – and begin to rid them of the Roman tyranny.

For us living in 2023, the false notion suggests it’s time to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, to preserve the nation of Israel – so that, beginning with the Middle East – God might flex His muscles and begin to rule and reign over all things.

Or, for us Americans, the notion might involve restoring the United States to its Christian foundations – so that this might be His new kingdom – where, once again, He rules and reigns over all things, and the unbelievers are driven out.

All three of our Scripture readings for tonight speak to this false notion. It begins with the false understanding of a Christian utopia here on earth – AS IF Christ is not already ruling and reigning over all things. He is! The problem is that we don’t see it, and we don’t believe it. What we experience doesn’t match up with the way we think things should be.

And that leads to the second problem – that we, as Christians, don’t realize what we already have. We forsake, or overlook, the Kingdom of God – where Christ Himself rules and reigns over all things (for our benefit and the benefit of our neighbors), through His Word and Sacraments.

So that we might know Christ and His kingdom – what Jesus began to teach (as Luke records in his Gospel) – Jesus continues to teach (as Luke records here in Acts). The words which Jesus had spoken to them, He continues to speak – “that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

He opens their minds – and ours – to understand the Scriptures. As St. Paul writes to the Ephesians – the Lord gives us “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of [Jesus Christ], 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.”

Just as the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus are important, so is His Ascension – even though it doesn’t look that way. I mean, why have a Divine Service on a Thursday night in May when everyone has so many other commitments? If the Ascension were so important – wouldn’t it look more like Good Friday or Easter here? Again, the problem is that we don’t realize what we have.

Christ has gathered you here this evening to open your ears and hearts and minds, so that you may understand the Scriptures – so that you may know “the riches of His glorious inheritance” to which He has called you.

The crucified and risen Christ comes into the midst of His disciples to show them that He lives, wounds and all. Rather than living in fear – He reveals and gives to them His victory over their enemies, their death – and ours.

Rather than trudging through life burdened with guilt and shame – He opens His mouth and speaks, and gives, His peace to them – that peace which is yours, because He has forgiven all your sin.

Rather than living as a slave to God’s Law – having been made righteous through the blood of Jesus Christ – His Law is now your delight. Like a little child who delights to please his father – so you, the dear child of God, see His Law as something that pleases your heavenly Father – and benefits your neighbor.

Since Christ now sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty – not only does that remind you that He is ruling and reigning over all things – but it also reminds you that He is there interceding for you. He has the Father’s ear!

Being a Christian doesn’t mean living in a utopian world – it never has, and never will. There is no place on earth that is free from sin, death and the devil – from a body that breaks down, a mind that is troubled, a soul that is tormented. Yes, in heaven all sin and its chaotic destruction will be gone and we will live in glorious bliss – but not until then. Now, it’s life in this world – which for us – should be a life of prayer.

In Christ, you have the Father’s ear! Not only can you pray to Him for all that troubles our society – for all your neighbor’s needs – but also for your daily struggles. And, since Christ crucified has been raised from the dead – and sits at the Father’s right hand – His wounds are always before the Father, declaring that He has done all this “for you” – and so you can be sure that the Father hears and will answer your prayers.

Do you realize that you have something the rest of the world does not have – you have the Father’s ear. He has given you His name so that you can call upon Him. And in Christ, your prayers are pleasing in His ears.

Dearly beloved, we live after the Ascension of Jesus Christ – which means He is hidden from our sight – but He is with us as He has promised – and He reveals where He is to be found. That’s why we gather here – around His Word and Sacraments – because through these means He is ruling and reigning over all things – ruling and reigning over your life – over your sin, your death, your daily struggles.

Dearly beloved, the Kingdom HAS BEEN restored – and you live in it – now, by faith, because it is hidden from sight – but when Jesus Christ comes again, you will see His Kingdom, how He has always been ruling and reigning – even as you will see Him, face to face. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.