

Good Morning and May Peace be with You,

It is not easy to bring you a message about the ending. The ascension of our savior is an ending and a transitory period, the end of his mission here on earth and the very beginning of our mission, as was pointed out in our first reading. So what is the lesson that we can take away from the miracle of the Ascension of Jesus to heaven.

If we look at our second lesson, Paul tells us about the Power of God, God put this power to work in Christ when he 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. This can mean that regardless of what is happening in our lives, or in our world, and it has certainly been a lot of late, that we know that our Lord and Savior still has the control and has not left us. That he is there, seated at the right hand of God, to intercede for us. It can be frustrating sometimes, and we certainly might wish that he intercede here on earth, but the promise of salvation is not of this earth, but of heaven, and it is there that Jesus is. It is not up to us to understand the will of God, but to trust in the salvation that he has given us.

The ascension of our Lord and Savior is also about his presence, both in our world and in our lives. Jesus performed many miracles documented in the Bible, the ascension among them, but at any point did he ever perform the miracle of being in two places at the same time. He was the Son of God, but he was also fully human, and bound to the rules of this world. His ascension was ultimately necessary so that he could be present in our world, in all places, and to all people. Martin Luther preached on this very subject, "What good will it do you if you merely preach that Jesus ascended up to heaven and sits there with folded hands?...For this purpose did he ascend up thither, that he might be down here, that he might fill all things and be everywhere present, which thing he could not do had he remained on earth."

Finally, the ascension of Jesus is very much about promise. Jesus promises that his disciples will be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and not many days from now. The promise represents hope, and the blessing of the Holy Spirit represents change and a call to action as well. "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?," and from Luke, "and they were continually in the temple blessing God." Isn't this a little bit like most of us? We have received the scriptures, had them explained to us, come to love our Lord and Savior, been washed clean of our sins, and there we are worshipping. We are still waiting, as Jesus said, "Stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." which is a preview of the message from next week. But knowing this, why then do we sit here and wait still. "Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations." This is definitely a call to action, so we cannot be stuck in a transitory mode once we are given the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is the promise of the Holy Spirit that calls on us to not only worship the Lord, but to do as he did while he was on this earth. We are called to witness to the power and the presence of God, but also to be that power and presence. We as individuals and as a church body are to provide succor to the sick, feed the hungry, and fight oppression. Called not only to work for justice and peace, to seek reconciliation in conflict, but also to teach others to do these things as well. And by the power of the Holy Spirit has not the church done these things. Through food banks and missions have not loaves and fishes been distributed to far more than 5000, or even 5,000 times 5,000. Have not the hands of gentle people provided healing to the sick and injured, comforted the grieving, as well as delivered them the word of God through the scriptures. Has not the Holy Spirit made disciples among many nations, starting with the eleven remaining disciples, to spread the message of forgiveness of sin and eternal life through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior? There are certainly more than the original disciples spreading that message now.

That promise of a reward of eternal life has not been described to us, so there is room for faith. Faith in God to deliver us to that reward. Faith in God that it is his will and purpose, not ours, that guides the believers, and faith in Jesus, seated at the right hand of God to intercede on our behalf when we fall short. Faith that the ascension of our Lord and Savior is a presage of when we too will be called to join Him. But note that Jesus doesn't promise rewards on earth in his teachings, but rewards in heaven, and he did preach this throughout his ministry on earth.

I normally like to share a story, but today's lesson doesn't really lend itself to a story that might reveal a deeper meaning to the message, so let me share something personal instead. The month of May to me, is always the month that I remember my mother, Betty, since it houses Mother's day, which is the day on which she passed in 2014. It is why my Dad also travels out here to be with us and we sit in the pew that is dedicated to her memory. We do not always talk about the purpose of the visit, but it is there, as is she. My parents brought me to the church, and watched my grow in faith, and they always encouraged me in that faith.

It would have been easy to lose faith in dark times of illness, and in the struggles of life, but it was through her love and tenderness, support and care, even in her terminal illness, that I was able to keep my faith through my own dark times. I know that it must have been hard for her to see me go through those times, because in many ways I am like her, and have little tolerance for those that want to wallow in their own self-pity, which is basically what I was doing. But she didn't show it, much, instead being the good shepherd and seeing me back in out of the storm. And she did get to see me emerge again into the light before she passed. And having her and my father in this church as I married my wife was the culmination of that journey back into the light, and something that I am beyond blessed that she got to share. I got to help care for her at the very end,

though not for very long, and I hope I did half the job that she did caring for me and for others. I know that I will see my mom again when I do get my reward in heaven, but I also know, that like our Lord and Savior, she is always present with me, and I am a much better person for it.

And so while we return to our Jerusalem to wait for the promised Holy Spirit, we have to acknowledge as well that the waiting is the hardest part, and that is not just a song by Tom Petty. After all, we have the “fast pass” when you go to the theme park to avoid waiting in line, we can order our food before we pick it up so we don't have to sit and wait, there is self-checkout at the stores so we don't have to wait for a cashier, and streaming services release an entire season at once, so that we can binge our favorite shows instead of having to wait until next week. So while we wait for the Holy Spirit, “not many days from now”, and we wait for the kingdom, “it is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority,” let us prepare. Let us pray for patience, but let us also pray for the strength to use the power that we share in the Holy Spirit to do the work of God in this world, to bring his gospel message, but also his healing hand, the news that sins have been forgiven, so we can be at peace with our neighbors, for as our Lord taught us, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.”

The ascension of our Lord is a joyful story, and it reminds us certainly of the Power of Jesus, shared with us through the promise of his Holy Spirit, and of his Presence among us, as well as his Presence in Heaven. While we wait, let us also prepare, so that we might spread witness to the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Let us worship in the temple, but also let us bring others into that worship.