

Order of Worship for May 16, 2021 - The Ascension of our Lord (observed)

Prelude

P: Jesus Christ is risen!

C: He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Opening Hymn: “A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing” - Hymn #493 (vs 1-4)

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

P: When we were baptized, we died and were buried with Christ.

C: We were baptized so that we might have a new life, as Christ was raised to life by the glory of God the Father.

P: Therefore, let us confess our sins to God, so that we may know the hope to which we have been called. Almighty and all-merciful God,

C: We are dead in trespasses and sin; we have no power to rise. We have offended Your majesty and defied your divinity; we have brought death and darkness where You once said, "Let there be light." We deserve the doom that You have decreed. We are dead in trespasses and sin; we have no power to rise.

P: But Christ is risen.

C: Risen indeed!

P: Since we have been united with Him in a death like His,

C: we will certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. For His sake we implore You, O God, forgive our sins, and set our minds on things above, where Christ is, seated at Your right hand. Let us be raised with Christ.

P: "Thus it is written, that the Messiah had to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed in His name." That word is now proclaimed to you. In the name of Jesus, your sins are forgiven.

C: We have been forgiven! Alleluia!

Entrance Psalm:

P: God has gone up with a shout,

C: the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

P: The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand,

C: until I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

P: The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,

C: “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

P: The LORD is at your right hand;

C: He will shatter kings on the day of His wrath.

All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P: God has gone up with a shout,

C: the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

P: The Lord be with you,

C: **and also with you.**

P: Let us pray. Almighty God, as Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: **Amen.**

First Reading: Acts 1:1–11

R: In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. To them He presented Himself alive after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

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.”

So when they had come together, they asked Him, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.”

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

Epistle: 1 John 5:9-15

R: If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that He has borne concerning His Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning His Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: **Thanks be to God.**

Holy Gospel: John 17:11-19

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the seventeenth chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which you have given Me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in Your name, which You have given Me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon Hymn: “Up Through Endless Ranks of Angels” - Hymn #491

Sermon: “The One Way” - 1 John 5:9-15

How much control should the government have over our lives? It was thought in this country that the government was there to protect our nation in wars and make treaties with other nations, but otherwise leave us alone. The Great Depression was such a crisis that people looked to the government to rescue them. During World War 2 the government had great control over peoples’ daily lives, but everyone was so behind “helping our boys overseas” that they readily gave the government what was needed to win the war. Since then there has been a tug of war between more and less government control. The sensible idea is to have a balance.

It can be great to have government control over things in a crisis, like producing vaccines in record time; but that can lead to only one source for where to get things. The result is that the prices go up and the quality goes down. That is why it has been a blessing that we have several companies producing vaccines. It is also why we have government laws to control monopolies—to keep companies from taking advantage of people by providing the only means they have to get a product or service.

But think of the “monopoly” we have in our Christian faith. Our epistle lesson from 1 John affirms, “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” Jesus is the only way, not just one or the easiest way or the best way, but the only way.

Theologians call this “monopoly” the “scandal of particularity,” that Jesus is the only way. How out of sync that must appear in a world in which diversity is so promoted. How can we say we have the truth and others do not unless we enslave everyone to our point of view? Since traditionally Christianity has not been so common in Africa and Asia and Europeans

conquered the Americas, is this just white domination over people of color? How can we say a Christian is any better than a sincere Hindu or Buddhist?

That seems all the more harsh when we think of all the people who have lived in the world and never heard of Jesus. We know that the vast majority of Native Americans died from old world diseases like smallpox before they heard the Gospel from missionaries. People lived for centuries in the highlands of New Guinea and had no contact with the outside world until the 20th century. The countries with the largest populations—India and China—did not receive missionaries until the 1500's. And those missionaries were accompanied by mercenaries out to exploit the wealth of those lands. Christianity had spread into western Asia and North Africa even more than Europe, but those areas were taken over by Islam. And there are more even in so-called "Christian" nations in Europe, the Americas, and Australia who only know Jesus as a good, wise man, never really being told the message of how He saved us from sin. If Jesus is the only way, are all those people condemned?

John's epistle was written in the context of the Gospel being brought to people who are both Jews and Gentile. The Jews believed in the one, true God, the God of the Old Testament. Many of the Gentiles were people exposed to that God by going to Jewish synagogues. The people John wrote to believe in God. The question he poses to them is, "Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who has come to reveal God to us?" These are people who heard the message of Jesus. Some reject Him, not because they are ignorant, but because they clearly reject Him. John is saying that if you reject Jesus, you reject God.

Why would people reject Jesus? Franz Pieper was a famous theologian in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the 1800's. He wrote a three-volume work of Christian doctrine which is still used to train pastors. In it he writes that there are only two religions—the religion of the law and the religion of the Gospel. Other than Christianity, all religions are about how we work our way into God's favor or into a state of peace and prosperity. It is based on what we do whether by pagan rituals, meditating ourselves into a state of "Nirvana," doing enough good to get to heaven, depending on human technology to solve our problems, or just make the most of what we have. This is the religion of the law. Only in Jesus is there the religion of the Gospel, the religion of God coming down to us in Jesus, about what He does, not us.

The way of Jesus involves rejecting any way I can save myself. I can't depend on how good I am, how much I have, how happy or content I feel, or whom I know. If we don't trust in Jesus, about what He does, then we are trusting in something else—ultimately ourselves.

That is the problem facing the people to whom John wrote. Either there were the Jews who rejected Jesus because they didn't want to lose their status over others as the children of Abraham or they were the pagan Greeks who emphasized getting to a higher plane of intellectual life and going beyond the pain and suffering of this world. Both of the views rejected Jesus because it would mean that anyone, even Gentiles, even the ignorant, even the poor and sick, could have life through Jesus.

That is what the message means for us today. It is not talking about other people and how they must believe in Jesus. It is talking about what Jesus means for us. What rejects Jesus is either when I think I am better than others or when I put what I feel I deserve over what God freely gives to me.

The movie “No Country for Old Men” won the academy award for best picture. It depicts a sheriff in west Texas who despairs over the evil in the modern world. Like that sheriff we can long for the “good old days” when things were better. But near the end the sheriff is told by his uncle who is an ex-lawman that times were just as evil in the past. Our world is full of sin, of rejecting God and therefore rejecting one another.

That is why John directs us to Jesus. He is not the only way, but the one way we have to be rescued from evil. John tells us:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

It is that confidence that leads us to proclaim that Jesus is the way to salvation. It is not that we have the right way and others have the wrong way as much as we have such good news that we want to share it with others. We don't know why we and not others were raised in families that were Christian. We just know the confidence we have in Jesus and which we can offer to others. That comes when we first realize that we are not better than others and we too are tempted to try to earn our way to happiness. Then we can see the overwhelming love of God in Jesus, a love that moves us to live in that love in how we relate to other people.

People will continue to reject Jesus, just as we are tempted to think of ourselves better than others or try to earn our way to salvation. That is what sin does to us. But Jesus died to forgive us from that and rose so we can live in a new way, a way that trusts in Him. For He is the one way.

Nicene Creed

Prayers of the Church

P: It is a temptation, O God, to cry out:

C: "Do not leave us!"--

P: to stand, slack-jawed, upon a mountaintop,

C: gazing heavenward, awaiting Christ's return.

P: It is a temptation, O God.

C: Lead us not into temptation.

P: But deliver us, O God.

C: Do not leave us comfortless.

P: Send Your Holy Spirit--

C: the promised counselor.

P: Then we will spread the good, good news.

C: Then it will spread like wildfire.

P: Through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Service of the Sacrament

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Words of our Lord

Lord's Prayer

Communion Hymns

"See the Lord Ascends in Triumph" - Hymn #494

"On Christ's Ascension I Now Build" - Hymn #492

Dismissal:

Closing Prayer:

P: Look up to heaven, O people of God,

C: for there is where our Savior is seated at the right hand of God.

P: Look down upon the ground, O people of God,

C: for this is where our feet must tread as we spread the Good News of our ascended Lord.

P: Look all around, O people of God,

C: for this is where opportunities abound for us to serve Christ Jesus, our King.

P: As we look up, O Lord,

C: encourage and inspire us, we pray.

P: As we look down upon the ground, O Lord,

C: strengthen and sustain us in our witnessing, we pray.

P: And as we look all around, O Lord,

C: keep us open to your call and aware of Your will. Amen.

Blessing

P: Let us bless the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: "A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing" - Hymn #493 (vs 5-6)

Postlude