

Order of Worship for May 21, 2023

Prelude

P: Jesus Christ is risen.

C: He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Reading of the Ascension Story: Acts 1:1–11

(The Ascension of our Lord)

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.

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

Confession of sins

P: O Christ, who ascended to heaven:

C: Hear us as we pray, and have mercy on us.

P: Jesus, You are seated at the right hand of the Father,

C: Forgive us, Lord, for the many times when we feel the need to be noticed in special places and seen as extremely important in certain circles of society.

P: O Christ, to You all power has been given in heaven and on earth, Your Kingdom has no end.

C: Forgive us, Lord, for those times when we see our kingdoms, our country, our wealth and security as the only real answer for our worries and our fears.

P: Jesus, at Your Ascension the entire company of heaven burst into song at the mention of Your Holy Name,

C: Forgive us, Lord, for the many other names that have a stronger influence on our lives than your name.

P: Christ Jesus was put to death for our trespasses

C: and raised for our justification.

P: In the name of our Ascended Lord, you are forgiven.

C: Amen.

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm: Psalm 110

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

P: after the order of Melchizidek." 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.

Hymn of Praise: "On Christ's Ascension I Now Build" – Hymn #492

Salutation and Prayer of the Day

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Let us pray...O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Epistle: Ephesians 1:15–23

R: For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, 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, 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. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Holy Gospel: John 17:20-26

P: The Holy Gospel according to Saint John, the 17th chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: Jesus prayed, “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and You in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, may be with Me where I am, to see My glory that You have given Me because You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know You, I know You, and these know that You have sent Me. I made known to them Your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

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: “At God’s Right Hand” – Ephesians 1:15-23

We celebrate Ascension Day today. It’s one of the Feast days of the church, the end of the earthly ministry of Jesus, but we don’t make a big deal out of it. European countries may not have many Christians anymore, but they still celebrate Ascension Day, 40 days after Easter, with a day off of work. Here at Memorial we stop lighting the Christ Candle until Christmas, to show that we’ve reached the end of the earthly ministry of Jesus. The Ascension is as important in the life of Jesus as Christmas is, but we don’t get a lot of visitors today.

Ascension seems strange to us. After all, we know that Jesus didn’t just go to up to heaven through the clouds. We know what’s above the clouds now. We have names for the different layers of the atmosphere, and for what lies beyond. We’ve seen the pictures from the James Webb Space Telescope and the International Space Center of what is up there. Jesus’ ascension doesn’t mean he’s out on some other planet, like some more cult-like groups believe.

When he was on earth, Jesus was the one who was alongside his disciples. He was with them as they journeyed from town to town. He was with them to teach them and answer their questions. Once he ascended, the Holy Spirit would be the one coming alongside them. The Holy Spirit would come to them, be present with them, and give them peace.

Jesus didn’t ascend to abandon us. He ascended to complete his mission. O.P. Kretzmann wrote “The Ascension did not take Jesus away... It brought heaven near... In the realm in which He now reigns time and space have no meaning... There is no up and down, no near and far, no darkness, and no distance in the world of faith... He is as near as yesterday's prayer, today's joy, tomorrow's sorrow... His homecoming has made heaven a home for us who still walk far from home...”

What the Ascension means, though, is that Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father. It means that Jesus rules everywhere. What the Ascension means is that instead of being limited to being only in one particular place at one particular time, Jesus returned to where he exercises his divine attributes of omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence. As Eugene Peterson writes, “Jesus rules church and world and every last one of us from heaven’s strategic center.”

Jesus is in control. What that means for us is that we are not. And that’s ok. In fact, that was part of the first sin that Adam and Eve committed at the Fall into sin. They wanted to be in control, instead of letting God be in control. They wanted to be like God.

We can still fall into that trap. We can look around the world and see that everything is still a mess, and wonder if Jesus really is in control.

Devotional writer Os Guinness writes, “In short, the modern world quite literally ‘manages’ without God. We can do so much so well by ourselves that there is no need for God, even in his church. Thus we modern people can be profoundly secular in the midst of explicitly religious activities. Which explains why so many modern Christian believers are atheists unawares.”

Author Parker Palmer says we fall into the trap of “‘functional atheism,’ the belief that ultimate responsibility for everything rests with us.”

Of course, that’s all Law. That’s all about what we should do, and fail to do. Instead, we need to remember the Gospel, remember what God has done for us. That’s what Ascension reminds us of.

Ascension Day is a strange day for us to celebrate, but it’s an important reminder of way things are. It reminds us who’s in control of the world, and that it’s not us. It reminds us what Jesus has called us to do; to share the knowledge of all that Jesus has done for us, to proclaim that Jesus is Lord. It reminds us that Jesus did descend at Christmas to be born of the Virgin Mary, that he did suffer, was crucified, died, and was buried. It reminds us that Jesus did rise from the dead that first Easter morning. It reminds us that Jesus did ascend to heaven, where he now sits at the right hand of God the Father, ruling above all. It reminds us that He will return the same way that we saw him leave, to bring heaven to earth and to bring an end to sin and sadness. It reminds us that Jesus is the name above all names, and is above all other powers and authorities.

Jesus assumes the place of honor and power “at the right hand” on the throne. Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading and interceding for us. From there he gives us a mission, under his authority, to go and spread the good news of all that He has done for us. He invites us to come forward, to be with him, to take a place with him at a feast that will never end.

This morning we will send the children out to plant flowers around the church outside.

Volunteers have gone out to prepare places for these flowers. They have gotten their hands and knees dirty, and will again as the children plant the flowers. We do so as part of Rogate, which is the Latin word for pray. This ritual of the fields has been celebrated since the eighth century in Europe, and reminds us we can pray on earth, for the earth. We can pray in the places where we are; in the places God has planted us. It also reminds us that God didn’t just create heaven and earth at the beginning, but continues to be active, making rain to fall and the sun to shine,

controlling the seasons and making the seeds grow.

Now, here at Memorial, our celebration of Rogate is influenced not by the moveable liturgical calendar, but by the academic calendar of Iowa State. It's part of being in the place that we're in. This year, we celebrate it on this Ascension Sunday. It reminds us of why Jesus had to ascend. If he stayed, if he remained with his disciples, they wouldn't have to grow. They wouldn't have had to do things on their own. They wouldn't have traveled to the places they did. But because Jesus ascended, they did. But they went knowing that they wouldn't be alone and that Jesus was in control.

Richard Lischer, a retired homiletics professor from Duke University, wrote a book about his first congregation in rural Illinois, and in it, he describes the Rogate service held there. The congregation gathered together in the church, then walked across the street to a farmer's field, where they placed seed into soil, and asked God to bless it. He ends the description of the service with this explanation of the meaning of Rogate: "When we do any kind of useful work, we join the act of creation in progress and help God keep the universe humming."

After Jesus ascended, what comes next? Now what do we do? The work God has set out for us to do. Jesus is seated at God's right hand, still controlling things. But now we are Jesus' hands and feet. God continues to do his work through us, as we are sent out into the world. We're sent out into our vocations, callings; within our families, in our work, in our communities. We're sent out to where we experience God at work in the world and at work in our lives. As we look out at spring, as we celebrate Rogate this morning, we see the same realization that Dr. Lischer and his congregation had: we are joined in God's work of creation and re-creation.

Prayer of the Church

P: Lord, in Your mercy

C: hear our prayer.

Offering & Voluntary

The Call to Holy Communion

P: Jesus, who rose and ascended to sit at the Father's right hand, bids us to come to His table to receive His true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine of His Holy Supper.

Therefore, we partake of His Sacrament, confessing our faith in Him:

All: I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be his own and live under him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reign to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

The Words of Our Lord:

The Lord's Prayer:

P: The peace of the Lord be with you alwasys.

C: Amen.

Distribution: *“See the Lord Ascends in Triumph”* - **Hymn #494**

“He’s Risen, He’s Risen” - **Hymn #480**

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 of the Seed and Soil:

P: While earth remains, there will be day and night, summer and winter, planting and harvest, cold and heat. For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return until they have watered the earth, making it blossom and bear fruit, and give seed for sowing and bread to eat, so shall the Word, which comes from God prevail.

C: It shall not return to Him fruitless without accomplishing His purpose of succeeding with the task He gave it.

P: Lord of springtime and harvest, bless these plants as symbols of the seed that is sown throughout the world that it may nourish and sustain Your people. And so water the soil with Your gentle rain and warm it with Your golden sunshine, that it may bear fruit to the glory of Your name and the welfare of Your people.

C: Amen.

Children’s message:

Dismissal of Children:

Hymn: *“On What Has Now Been Sown”* - **Hymn #921**

Final Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Postlude