

May 29, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

### Jesus' Ascension Means that...

Jesus completed your salvation

Jesus' kingdom is spiritual

Jesus gave us work to do

“Then what?” Dr. Luke asked as he leaned forward with eagerness in his heart and a pen in his hand. One of the apostles – maybe Peter or John – explained, “It was 40 days after he rose from the dead. Our minds still could not figure out how he was alive again after being crucified, but it was clear that he was alive. He ate lunch with us. Then, after lunch, we walked to hill just north of Bethany. He told us to stay in Jerusalem until we were baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Then he lifted his hands to bless us as he started floating up. We kept staring up at him as he looked down at us and smiled. He got smaller and smaller as we stood there with our mouths open and our necks craned. We were startled when two angels – they looked like handsome men wearing pure white robes – spoke to us.” Jesus’ ascension was one of those many events that would remain indelibly etched in his disciples’ minds. They never forgot it. The Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed all say, “**he ascended into heaven.**” We know WHAT happened, but do we know WHY it happened? If someone asked you, “So, what’s the big deal about Jesus ascending into heaven?” how would you respond? This morning we see that Jesus’ ascension means that Jesus completed your salvation, that Jesus’ kingdom is spiritual, and that Jesus gave us work to do.

### Jesus completed your salvation

Six months ago, we focused on the incarnation. He came into this world on a rescue mission. As true God, Jesus is eternal with no beginning and no end. He is everywhere all the time. He has all power. He knows all things. By a miracle of the Holy Spirit, however, Jesus started growing inside of a maiden named Mary. He set aside the full use of his power as true God and, in a barn in Bethlehem, was born as a helpless babe. While remaining true God, he also became truly human. Ever since Adam and Eve infected the world with sin by disobeying God, every human being has been born already infected with sin. That sinful nature shows itself in so many sad ways in our lives – complaining, getting our priorities mixed up so that we are more focused on the things of this earth than the things of God, using words that hurt others instead of encouraging. My ego keeps trying to crowd Jesus out of my life. At times I am more concerned about what other people think about me than what God thinks about me. When I’m being careful not to focus on me, then my

sinful nature wants other people to think good things about me since I’m so humble. Sin is cancer in me that poisons everything I do. And it’s in you, too. None of us are perfect. As people who rebel against God’s Word and will, Adam and Eve and all of us deserve to be punished. God had every right to tell Adam and Eve and us, “You want to turn your backs on me? Fine! You can spend eternity apart from me!” Instead, in pure compassion and love, God went looking for his lost children and promised to send a Savior. God also went looking for you, otherwise you would not even be here this morning.

Jesus became fully human so that he could come into this world and be our substitute. We deserved to be forsaken for our sins, so Jesus was forsaken for us. We deserved to be punished, so Jesus was punished for us. We deserved to die, so Jesus died for us. The fact that he left this world by floating up to heaven means that his job is done. I like to think that, as the disciples stared at Jesus floating up, some beams of sunlight shined through the nail marks on his hands and through his feet. As we sang in our Song of Praise, “**See he lifts his hands above; see, he shows the prints of love.**” The nail wounds are the proof that he loved you, proof that he paid the price for your sins, proof that your sins are forgiven, proof that you will one day be in heaven with Jesus. As we will sing in our closing hymn, “**On Christ’s ascension I now build the hope of my ascension.**”

During the 40 days between Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension, Jesus appeared to his disciples many times. One moment, he was not with them and the next moment, he was with them. After a short visit, suddenly, he was gone again. During those 40 days, they never knew when he was going to appear. By floating up to heaven in their sight, Jesus was letting them know that they would not see his physical presence any more. After proving to them beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was alive again, his work on earth was done. Salvation is complete. Nothing more needs to be done. You are saved and so we sing, “Alleluia!” as Jesus ascends.

### Jesus’ kingdom is spiritual

Many Jewish people hoped that the Messiah would throw off the rule of the Romans and restore the earthly kingdom of David and Solomon to make Israel a world super-power again. The disciples were also hoping for an earthly kingdom. They wanted to be rulers with huge castles and lots of servants and lots of food and royal robes. As Jesus was talking with them, they eagerly asked him again and again (:6), “**Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel.**”

A third-grade teacher gave her students a worksheet that had all sorts of different shapes on it – triangles, circles, squares, etc. The instructions were, “Name each shape.” On the line under each shape, one little fellow wrote, “Bob. Fred. Jim,” and on and on. He misunderstood what the teacher was looking for. The disciples were just as dense. At the very least, we could expect Jesus to hit his forehead and scream, “How can you guys be so thick-headed? Every day for three years, I told you not to set your hearts on the things of this world.” Or, he could have simply fired them as apostles and called others to take the message of salvation to the world.

It’s easy to point an accusing finger at the disciples for not getting it, but we’d have to point at ourselves too. We even have a completed New Testament with this example of the dimwitted disciples, and we still stay super focused on the things of this world as if the be all and end all of our existence was making money and getting more things and having good times. **“You fool!”** (Luke 12:20), Jesus said about the fellow who focused on the things of this world so much that he forgot about the next world and ended up in hell. The devil will continue to use the treasures and pleasures of this world to get us to take our eyes off of Jesus. Our sinful, selfish nature is very attracted to the things of this world and it is difficult to keep Jesus as first place in our hearts and lives.

Jesus told Pilate (John 18:36), **“My kingdom is not of this world.”** God’s kingdom is in your hearts. It’s faith, trust in him as your only Savior from sin and your only hope for heaven. That’s what we pray for every time we pray, **“Your kingdom come.”** We are praying that, through Word and Sacrament, God would strengthen our focus on Jesus as our Savior and that more and more people would be brought to faith so they can join us in heaven one day. This world and the things that we can see and touch in this world are all temporary. This sin infected world will always have pain and sorrow, wars and rumors of wars, greed and jealousy, crimes and innocent victims of crime, disease and death. Do not get discouraged and do not despair. We are just pilgrims passing through. If he wanted, Jesus could have most certainly stayed here and turned Jerusalem into an earthly capitol with streets of gold and armies of angels. Instead, he removed his physical presence from this world. His ascension makes it clear that his kingdom is not about the things of this world. His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom of faith that leads to eternal happiness in heaven.

#### Jesus gave us work to do

Maybe you’ve heard the cute story that was shared in Bible class a few months ago when we studied the apostles. Jesus ascended into heaven amid

shouts of joy. Angels sang his praises on a job well done. One of angels said, “Awesome! Jesus, you lived, died and rose to save the world. Now, how are you going to get the message to the world?” Jesus explained that he left 12 men behind to share the message. The angel was shocked. After all, those were the 12 men who were focused on the things of the world, deserted Jesus when he was arrested and made mistake after mistake. The angel asked, “But, Jesus, what if those 12 men fail? What is your other plan for getting the gospel to the world?” Jesus replied, “I have no other plan.”

While Jesus was on this earth, he was the one who told people about salvation and eternal life in heaven. Now that he is gone, his disciples were going to share that message with the world. As the disciples were still staring at the sky, the angels interrupted them and asked (:11), **“Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?”** In other words, “Nothing to see here, guys. Stop staring at the sky. Go back to Jerusalem like Jesus said and wait for the Holy Spirit so that you can take the message of salvation to the world.” The idea of taking the gospel to the world would have been more than overwhelming to them, but Jesus promised to send his Holy Spirit, which he did on Pentecost, which will be our focus next Sunday. Jesus told them (:8), **“You will be my witnesses.”** God would do the work of converting people. All they had to do was to tell people what Jesus said and did.

By God’s grace, those 12 men did spread the gospel around the world. Those apostles are now in heaven, but the gospel continues remains. The baton has been passed to us. They have handed us the message of salvation in the Bible. We have what we need to spread the Word to others. When Jesus returns, he does not want to find us staring at the sky. Jesus gave us work to do. St. Matthew has a mission and it is not just to be a safe haven for WELS people who move to this area. Every week, I scan the obituaries in our local paper and check to see how many of those who died had a church home. A good number did not. That’s tragic. And most of those who have a church home belonged to churches where God’s Word is not taught correctly. That’s scary. Every one of us can do something. Pray that God’s kingdom come to you and others. Pray for more pastors and teachers and missionaries. Encourage seminary students. Give your hard-earned money as a thank-offering to Jesus in order to support the gospel ministry here and around the world. Volunteer to help this ministry in some way. Read Bible stories to your children and grandchildren. Be the face and voice and hands of Jesus as he shares his love with the world through you. Tell family and friends that Jesus loves them. Tell them about a world that is out of this world. Tell them about Jesus who ascended into heaven. Amen.