

The Ascension of Our Lord—May 1, 2008
Church of the Reformation, Affton, MO
Text: Ephesians 1:16—23

The Real World

Graduation at the Seminary is but 15 days away, just as it will come soon many colleges and high school. If not the commencement speaker, certainly the graduates have said or thought, “I can’t wait to get out of here and get into the real world.” Others, in references to churches, to believers, to Thursday night Ascension services, may use a similar phrase: “That doesn’t work in the real world”; implying that participation in worship, the confession of faith in Christ, years of study at the Sem or wherever are irrelevant to the real world, out of touch with reality, impractical, even silly.

While we may not be so blatant about it, we have to admit that the thought has crossed our minds: What does God have to do with my life? How will worship or Bible study help me with my bills, my health, my retirement? What does an event, some 2,000 years ago outside Bethany, with a few disciples saying farewell to their teacher—what does the Ascension have to do with the real world of our lives?

Perhaps we should ask a different question: What real world would that be? Would it be the world where we are in control of our lives, the world where we fix things, rush from here to there, text-messaging; cell-phoning, and I-tuning our way to high blood pressure, nervous edginess, and isolation? Would it be the world of crowded calendars, squeezed schedules, imposing deadlines that leave us gasping for air and a way out? Would it be the real world of our pride that trumps the lives of friends and family, the world of our calloused neglect of those in need, the world we have built with our needs and wants, our concerns and attention, and ourselves in the middle of it all? What do we have to show for the way we have ruled the worlds of our lives, the puny kingdoms of our own making? Broken marriages and relationships. Walls of fear and isolation. Guilt that pursues our days and our nights.

Today, the Ascension of our Lord, proclaims the reign of Christ Jesus over all things. The Ascension of our Lord makes clear and certain that the only real world is the world of which Christ is King. This real world of Christ’s reign is quite different from any reign of power and sword familiar to us. This fact should have been clear with the birth of Jesus, true God and true man, in the barn of

Bethlehem. The fact should have been clear with Christ's proclamation of repentance, of the closeness of the Kingdom, of the first being last, the last being first, and His coming to serve rather than to be served. This different reign of Christ's is made clear as the arms of the Son of God are stretched out on the cross against the dark Judean sky on God's Friday and He dies for the forgiveness of all sin—all of yours and all of mine. The reign and power of God are shown most clearly when "He raised [Christ] 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." With Christ's Ascension, God "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."

Christ's Ascension means that He has triumphed over the sin that entangles our lives; that He has defeated the death that is ours. Being seated at God's right hand means that Christ occupies the very same throne He has had for all eternity as the only-begotten Son of God, the throne He vacated, emptying Himself of His divine honor and glory to take on our flesh and bone as a man, humbling Himself in obedience to His own Law to save a world of lawbreakers. Ascension Day, this day, proclaims Christ's lordship over those who believe and over those who refuse to believe. For the kingdoms of this world are now the kingdom of our Lord and Christ. It's not as if we, through our prayers, pieties, our tears and feelings, could make Christ Lord—it is God the Father of glory who has made Christ King of kings and Lord of lords. Our faith no more seats Christ on the throne than our unbelief unseats Him.

The fact that Christ is Lord of all; the fact that He holds the whole world in His hands, means that He holds our lives, our hurts, our present concerns and our future uncertainties in the very hands that were nailed to the cross. Our Lord has not forsaken us—He has not withdrawn Himself from the real world of our lives; He has ascended far above all heavens, "rule and authority and power and dominion" that He might fill all things and that He might fulfill His promise: "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

To be sure, not every knee bends at the name of Jesus nor does every tongue acclaim that Jesus is Lord. Thank God that by His Holy Spirit, we do. What all should acknowledge and one day will acknowledge (with joy or regret), we now acknowledge: Jesus is Lord. Someone has said that we are

“pre-mature ambassadors”—premature because many do not recognize the reign of the one who sends us; nevertheless we are ambassadors of the one who is “head over all things.” We acclaim that Jesus is Lord, asserting that He who came to His creation on a mission of salvation, has accomplished His redeeming purpose. We confess that Christ is Lord, affirming that He is on the throne and that the control panels of creation are not governed by superstars of history whose pride is in their dust and ashes, but by the Christ. As ambassadors of the crucified and living Christ we echo prophet, evangelist, and the church in proclaiming that He shall reign forever. That means that we can live life with a reckless faith and at the same time in the quiet confidence that His will shall prevail. We need not fear that He will lose control or that His kingdom can be wrested from His hand. “Christ is Lord!” That confession expresses the purpose of our lives, that our wills are conformed to His and that we serve Him with a pure heart. Life becomes a single-minded ministry—to serve as He served—in a world that in its final gasping hours so desperately needs the Savior’s love. “Christ is Lord!” With this confession we press toward goal of our lives, so when our “little while” is finished on this earth, the glory we now behold by faith, we then will see in person, face to face, joining Christ in the victory He shares with us.

That is the real world proclaimed by the Ascension of our Lord, the real world in which we live and move and have our being. It is the world under the reign of Christ.

No wonder the new song! “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth, wisdom and might, honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12).

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