

Alleluia, He has risen! He has risen indeed Alleluia. Today is the seventh and final Sunday of Easter. Today is also Ascension Sunday, and on this day the phrase “He has risen indeed Alleluia.” takes on a whole new meaning.

What is so striking to me is that the Church has never made Ascension Day a formal holiday. Sometimes I wonder if it is because so few people understand the significance of the Day. I have a feeling that the average Christian would say, “I have no idea what the Ascension is all about, let alone, what it means for me.”

Given this, let me begin by telling you what it is. Ascension Day celebrates the day in which Jesus ascended to be with the Father. It took place 40 days after the resurrection. It is recorded in Acts Chapter 1, and there Jesus was “lifted up and a cloud took Him from their sight”.

I’m sure you noticed that after the Epistle Reading I extinguished the Christ Candle and that was a way to signify that Jesus has ascended, that we can no longer see him in his bodily form as they did in the post-resurrection accounts.

One thing I would like to say is that Jesus did not go up into heaven like one of Elon Musk’s space shuttles. You might think that sounds funny, but I heard someone say that recently. He literally believed Jesus was living on a part of Mars that we could not see. It sounds to me like he was taking too much of their theology from Pink Floyd’s album Dark Side of the Moon.

That is not what the Ascension is suggesting. What happened in the text is that he was lifted up and a cloud covered Him from their/our sight. Anyone who has ever been to the Smoky Mountains or in a thick fog knows this is not nearly as otherworldly as it sounds.

Understand, I don’t mean to cheapen the Ascension. It is simply that when we say Jesus has Ascended into heaven, it might sound like we are saying Jesus has left and he is a long way away, now in some distant galaxy perhaps a billion lightyears from us. That, however, is not the message you should take home with you on Ascension Day.

What I want you to take from today is that the Ascension of Jesus is His coronation moment. If on the cross Jesus was crowned with suffering, today on Ascension

Day, Jesus was crowned with glory: “He was lifted up” and crowned with Glory as the King of kings and the Lord of all heaven and earth.

And He is not far away. He is at “The right hand of the Father” which is not so much a designation of location, as if it’s locating him somewhere on the outermost reaches of the Universe. Rather it is a designation of his authority. In other words, He is the king of the universe, He is seated on this throne, and most importantly, He is not far away; in fact, He is close by, even if we can no longer see Him as they did.

Christ’s Ascension is important because this event helps us to know that Christ’s plan of Salvation and His mission on earth was complete. Every part that was prophesied about Him had to be fulfilled, and it was. Meaning, Jesus completed everything needed for our Salvation and after that He returned to the Father.

Consider the illustration. I have before you a tape measure. You know the saying: “measure twice and cut once.” Measurements are important if you want to get things right.

I think our culture is less like this side of the tape measure and more like this side. We give everyone their own marker and we say start wherever you want and number it however you like. Do it however you feel is right.

Well, no wonder we are such a mess. No one’s standard is the same. I can barely get along with myself...

John says if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not within us. It is because of our failures that all the prophesies had to be fulfilled. But here’s the point, we are not offered a theoretical salvation, but a real Savior. A true and complete payment had to be made and it was.

But if that is true why doesn’t it feel that way? Why does it not feel like Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. Well, let me ask you this, what should it feel like? To be fair, most of us want something different than what God has given us. I imagine all of us want what the disciples wanted in Acts Chapter 1. “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom?”

In John 17, the reading on the back of our bulletin, Jesus says a prayer for us. He said, “You are not of this world... yet I do not ask that the Father take them out of

this world.” Why did He pray that? I think the answer is because of something He said right before He ascended.

Here is how Jesus replied to their request to restore the kingdom, Jesus said, “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.”

God has not removed you from the world. Why? Because Jesus has a plan for you and the world... And the plan is made even more obvious when the Angel after the Ascension declared, “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.”

The point being is that He will return for you, but until then, Jesus is going to use you for His mission.

The resurrection and Ascension of Jesus attests to what lies ahead for all of us. Jesus is the first to be transformed, but he will not be the last. Scripture attests to the fact that on account of him we will all have a body like his. It is a body that will not be subject to corruption, sin, and death, and in fact, we will be transformed into something that none of us can conceivably imagine.

What does this “transformation stuff” mean for me? Well, consider your situation. For those who struggle getting around, your resurrected body will have knees that Isaiah would say, will be able to leap like a deer. For those who are getting forgetful, your resurrected body will have memory and an understanding that far exceeds that of Solomon. Picture a world in which cancer is not the final Word, heart-attacks no longer kill, and death is never the victor.

A transformed world, what a wonderful thing to think about, but what does that do for us now. During these times, we must remember all that stuff Jesus said in the Final Discourse of John 14-17? That stuff about sending the Holy Spirit and that stuff about abiding with Him in love and how we are made one with the Father as he is with the Father. Remember all that stuff about loving one another? It is all important because it too is meant to prepare us for what lies ahead.

The Apostles' Creed states, "he ascended into heaven." Although I said, we should be careful as to not make this statement suggest that Jesus is far from us, this statement is none the less so big and so grand that it cannot be limited by our narrow earth-bound concept of geography or location.

The ascension of Jesus confirms that Jesus is Lord, not just of his home habitat of Jerusalem and the Galilean countryside, nor is He just the Lord of our hearts. Jesus ascends to the right hand of the father and that means he reigns as Lord over all of creation.

What suffices for me is that we have a creator that has a plan and that plan is so much greater than anything I could have ever conceived to be possible. Most importantly, this cosmic plan of His, it includes me. It includes my body and my mind. One day I too will go to be with the father. At that time all that I know about myself and everything else will be transformed. Until then, I will trust Jesus and serve as he served.

The Ascension, everything about the Ascension should be cause to celebrate?
Thanks be to God.