

Sixth Sunday of Easter – Ascension Sermon
May 1, 2016
Acts 1:1-11
Great Expectations from Our Lord's Ascension
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Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

This coming Thursday is Ascension Day. The third great festival of the church year celebrates the Son of God's triumphant return to his throne on high including his human nature and body. God the Father has exalted Jesus Christ "higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe," [4:10] Paul wrote to the Ephesians. Because the Father has done that, we Christians have great expectations for when Jesus returns.

Since, sadly, we do not worship on Ascension, we look today at those **Great Expectations from Our Lord's Ascension**. We will get a real look at Jesus and share a place at God's right hand. We will hear a word of grace and enter into eternal life.

You may or may not be familiar with Charles Dickens novel, Great Expectations. In that story, the "expectations" mean a legacy to come for Pip. We discover right way that in his case the legacy to come is monetary wealth. This theme plays an important part in the book.

We have a legacy to come from our Lord's Ascension forty days following his resurrection from the tomb, and ten days prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Listen again to St. Paul this time writing to the Philippians about God the Father rewarding Jesus for becoming obedient even to death on a cross.

"Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name."[2:9] And again to the Ephesians, "seated him at this right hand in the heavenly realms...And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."[1:21, 22]

While the exalted Christ does all this, we cannot see him with our eyes. We do not know what Jesus looks like. Artists have depicted Jesus in his humiliation from almost effeminate to a body builder. They depict his glorified body primarily with rays of light coming off him. There is no way possible to capture the majesty and glory Jesus possesses now. We can't even imagine.

Our great expectation from Jesus' Ascension is that when he returns we will finally get a real look at Jesus. Now we see Jesus in the portraits our imaginations paint. Then with Job, "I myself will see him with my own eyes." [19:27] John wrote in his first epistle, "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."[3:2]

Where will we be when we get our first real look at Jesus? We share a place at God's right hand. This is the side of favor and acceptance. Jesus is there currently and when he returns he will take us to be with him where he is. We will share in the exaltation. We will receive the inheritance that awaits us. In the meantime, we do not stand around idly looking up into the sky. With the first disciples, we are Jesus' witnesses in the world beginning where we are. They would begin in Jerusalem then to Samaria then to Judea to the ends of the earth. Our concentric circles of evangelism and outreach begin in our families to our community to our country and to the world with fellow Christians sharing the good news from pole to pole.

God has given us the power of the Holy Spirit in his Word and sacrament to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. We baptize and teach others all things our exalted Savior teaches us. We do not need to know when Jesus will bring things to completion and translate his kingdom on this earth, the church, to the kingdom of glory. We do know it is coming. It is our Great expectation from our Lord's Ascension. We will hear a word of grace and enter into eternal life.

The angelic messenger told the disciples, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." How was Jesus' going? It was in his glorified body. It was visible. It was sudden without any notice. Jesus had told them before his death that he would ascend into to prepare a place for us, and then return to take us there. These will be the marks also of his return; physical, visible, sudden, inevitable. When Jesus returns, he will speak a word of grace, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."[Mt. 25:34] This inheritance of grace through Christ's blood is our great expectation, our legacy to come.

We were born spiritually bankrupt, dead and blind in our sin. The only expectation we could have in our sinful nature is God's anger and eternal punishment in hell on account of our total depravity and enmity against him. Instead, our great expectation from Jesus' Ascension is his word of grace and entrance into eternal life in the perfection of the timeless kingdom of glory.

When Jesus returns we will hear him speak the same word of grace he spoke to us at our baptisms. I forgive you all your sins. I remove all your guilt. I cancel all your punishment. You have been baptized into my Son's death. I have washed you and connected you to my Son's new life. Now live with him and gaze upon his face constantly at my right hand. Hear my word of welcome into the eternal life of heaven. This is your legacy that played such an important part in the story of your life.

This is all a bit like the blind beggar Jesus healed, isn't it? We read in St. Mark, chapter 8, that as our Savior first spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, the man at first could see only outlines of people. He said, "They look like trees walking around." When Jesus did it again, "his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly."[8:25]

The great expectation from our Lord's Ascension is that we will see clearly. We will see Jesus return just as we have seen him go into heaven. We will see Jesus face to face as we share a place at the Father's side of favor and honor. We will hear the word of grace and receive our legacy to come of promised eternal life. Now those are "Great Expectations". Amen. <SDG>