

# Ascension Day

## Resurrected to Ascend

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, OR

Rev. Mr. Bill Baker

Today we stand in the gulf between the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. On Easter our Lord overcame death, defeated Satan and paved the way to eternal life for those who would answer the call to put their trust in Him. The doctrine of the Resurrection is what separates Christianity from all other religions...our Redeemer lives! The Byzantine hymn sung by our Orthodox brethren, at their Pashcha celebration, so beautifully portrays our Lord's triumph; *"Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death and on those in the tombs bestowing life."* The sacrifice of Christ summed up so perfectly; Christ's death overcoming death itself and His Resurrection the gift of life overcoming the darkness of lives lived in the shadow of Satan. Only the light of Christ could reach into the darkness of our tombs and set our captive souls free. The entirety of Jesus' life was lived in sacrifice for us. He did nothing for His own benefit. He was and is the Word of God formed in human flesh so that God could relate to us in a way that we might understand and respond. Jesus was to be the propitiation, the reconciler, and the atonement between us and our Father in Heaven. His Incarnation would require His death and His death would require His Resurrection.

But His death and resurrection would not prove to be the end of His Work. The Word must get out that our salvation has come; the Word must get out that everlasting life has been offered. The Gospel of Christ must find its way into all the corners of the earth. Christ is Risen...He is Risen indeed but...He cannot stay with us in physical form if His message is to spread. The doctrine of the Ascension is as necessary to Christianity as is the Incarnation and the Resurrection. The Incarnation brought the Word of God to humanity and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ paid a debt we could not, but it is in His Ascension that the assurance of all He has done will remain eternally.

*"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel? And he*

*said unto them, it is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samarian, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:6-8).*

“And ye shall be witnesses...” Maybe not in Jerusalem or even in Judea; but maybe in Medford, Central Point, Jacksonville, Ashland...wherever you may be. Here lies the reason for the Ascension. It is we who will spread the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. He is the head that leads and guides the body but it is the body that does the work. Jesus in His humanity could not remain with us indefinitely after His resurrection. Something grand had to take place. We could not expect that Jesus would remain in human flesh upon the earth walking from place to place to spread His message. In His human form, even after the resurrection, He could not be omnipresent. We could not expect to see Him in Jerusalem while at the same time listen to His words as He speaks to us on the Sea of Galilee. But Christ, being now ascended, can be in all places at all times. He is now perpetually with all His disciples wherever they may be, guiding them as they guide others...guiding us as we share the good news.

It is also equally important to understand the need for each of us to have the actual indwelling of Christ within us. The day of Pentecost is coming soon; the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit; the day we are separated from the world and become living members of the body of Christ. The only way we can stand strong in our faith in Christ is to have the Holy Spirit within us...guiding us...bringing us peace...and comfort. The world is a tough place to live. There are many reasons that our spirits can be cast down but it is the Holy Spirit within us that provides the stability to overcome the darkness of a sinful world. Without the Ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father we would not have been able to receive this blessed gift from God. God in His infinite goodness foresaw our need and through Jesus has provided a way for us to deal with and ultimately overcome our sad estate. We now have joy in the Resurrection because Jesus has not only overcome death but has Ascended to the Father and is our constant intercessor, provider, comforter, and ultimate guide for each of us on our earthly journeys

leading us to the ultimate victory...to be with Him and with each other in Paradise.

The Ascension of Christ is crucial to the life and death of the Christian. It is only through the Ascension that we can truly be united to our Father in Heaven. Remember back to the promise that Christ made...Christ made a promise to us that would unite us to Him for all eternity. The night before His death and resurrection Jesus left us with an important remembrance and spiritual connection to Himself. In an upper room “...as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:26-29).

The real and true presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine; how could Jesus have been spiritually or sacramentally present in the elements of bread and wine if he had remained physically and materially present? His Ascension would be the requirement that would manifest itself in the descending of the Holy Spirit enabling Christ to be truly present in the elements of bread and wine at all Holy Communion over all the earth.

Jesus Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father, not in the sense of rest but in a position of triumph, a position of the highest authority and honor. And from this position He is ceaselessly active as intercessory for mankind...the advocate for all humanity. Christ has ascended...alleluia, alleluia. Come to the Table and share in the meal, share in the life eternal...share in the body and blood of our resurrected and ascended savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.