

Ascension 2006
Text: Luke 24:44-53 (3-Year)
Trinity Lutheran Church, Worden, IL
[Given at St. Peter's – Prairietown, IL]
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Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

A screaming new born wrinkled and red – a razor sharp knife on the eighth day shedding blood that runs and coagulates just like yours – sweat flowing into the wounds caused by 39 lashes from a Roman whip – a tree cut in two and set at right angles – iron nails driven through hands and feet splitting muscles and pushing bones aside. These are the things of Christianity. Real things, touchable things, physical things. Without them our faith is meaningless and empty; without them our faith is a joke, just another made up spiritualism of man.

So don't be more spiritual than God. Repent of your attempts to avoid the physical with a falsely spiritual piety. You cannot fulfill God's commandment to love your neighbor by thinking nice thoughts about your neighbor but always avoiding his physical presence. You cannot avoid the duties you owe your parents and other family members with an email at Christmas time. You give only pagan comfort to the bereaved if all you say is, “Well, he's in a better place now” or “She's finally free of that body of hers.”

Yes, repent of this avoidance of the physical because the Good News is so much better than that fluffy spiritualism. The Good News of Jesus Christ is the Good News of the Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, become a real human being for us. One of the Holy Three is one of us. God is our brother – literally sharing our flesh and blood. We do not worship an air-brushed angelic Jesus who floats hither and yon and who happily left his body behind. No – we worship the God-man who has body hair and DNA and a certain blood type; who bids Thomas stick his hand in the spear wound and his finger in the mark made by those nails. He is touchable. He has a body. He always will.

And that's why when comforting the bereaved it's not good enough to say “Well, he's in a better place now.” True – a departed Christian's soul rests with Christ, which St. Paul calls better by far – but that's not the whole Truth. The whole truth is that Jesus is up from the grave in his body and that he will raise the bodies of Christians as well. The whole truth is that our salvation is not complete until we stand in the kingdom of God in resurrected bodies that are like Jesus' resurrected body. The whole truth is that while we do not mourn as those who have no hope – we do still mourn. Death is still evil. It is wrong for our souls to be separated from our bodies – for our bodies are us just as much as our souls are us.

That's why Jesus must become incarnate and take up human flesh from his Blessed Mother Mary. If we were really just our souls, Jesus would have no need

of having a human body. But we are soul and body and so God the Son took up a human soul and body so that he might save us completely, in both body and soul. For it is with his body and his soul and his divinity that he saves us. In his body he bears the wounds earned by all your transgressions of the law. In his soul he feels the immense weight of guilt, shame, and separation from God that your rebellion caused. And united to this body and soul is his divinity – which makes the whole sacrifice of infinite worth.

And so death comes to God on the cross and the sins of the world, and your sins, are atoned for, forgiven, taken away. Peace is made with God by God for men in a Man. And after his Sabbath rest in the tomb, Jesus comes up from the dead alive in body and soul and divinity. For there is no Jesus apart from his flesh. From Mary's womb and on to forever he is personally and permanently united to his humanity.

So do not think that this festival of the Ascension means that Jesus is no longer human as well as divine. Do not suppose that simply because we can't see his body in the same way the disciples did that his presence is gone from us or that he only remains with us in a fluffy spiritualistic way. Remember: there is no Jesus apart from his humanity and there is no humanity apart from soul and body. So if Jesus cannot be with us in his body, he cannot be with us in his humanity, and thus he cannot be with us at all.

So it is merely the visible presence of Jesus that he withdraws in his Ascension not his bodily presence. Indeed, he Ascends to fill all things with his humanity that he might be with us at all times. For remember – Jesus is God united to Man. We don't fully see what that means until after his resurrection. Before his resurrection, Jesus held back the use of his authority and power as God united to Man. But after his resurrection we see the awesome wonder of this union between God and Man. Not only can Thomas place his hands in Jesus side, not only can Jesus breathe on his disciples and eat broiled fish, but he can also take the body born of Mary and walk through locked doors and a stone rolled over a tomb's door; he can appear suddenly on the road to Emmaus and then disappear from sight. In other words, the humanity in Jesus now shares in the power of his divinity.

This is the meaning of his Ascension: not that he is now less with us, but that he is now more with us. For he has ascended to fill all things. But do not here fall back into the trap of being more spiritual than God. That Jesus is ascended and fills all things does not mean that you can find Jesus on the golf course or at the mall or at the fishing hole. Jesus is everywhere, yes; but he has not promised to be everywhere for you. We cannot forcibly take hold of God however and wherever we wish. We do not control God. We must find him where he has promised to be for us.

And you will search the Scriptures in vain for a promise to be there for you

to receive on the 9th tee or at Wal-Mart. No, instead he promises to be with you and for you in his Word and Sacraments – and nowhere more closely to you in all his fullness than in the Holy Supper of his real Body and real Blood. Now in his Supper Jesus can be with you and all Christians around the world in all times and places in a way even more intimate than his visible presence among the disciples. Now he fills you with his own self in all his fullness. This is why the Lord's Supper is the center of our worship – why the altar is in the center of our churches – why we kneel and bow to receive the Supper: because it is Jesus and we always kneel in his presence and he is the center of our lives.

So note well the sermon hymn today – it is a hymn written to celebrate and adore our Lord in his Supper. In the Lord's Supper you have the same Jesus born of Mary in his flesh and his blood, even

“Though the lowliest form now veil [him],

As of old in Bethlehem,

Here as there [his] angels hail [him],

Branch and flower of Jesse's stem.

Alleluia!

We in worship join with them;”

Yes, we worship and receive the Lord Jesus in his Holy Supper for he is the
 “Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendor,

First begotten from the dead,
 [He] alone, our strong defender,
 [He] lifts up [his] people's head.

Alleluia!

Jesus, true and living bread!

For at the high altar of Christ's Holy Supper we know that what appears to the eyes to be but bread is really the True and Living Bread: our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh; we know that because his flesh and blood are united to his divinity this happens according to his Word at altars around the world, even this altar in your midst, even

Here our humblest homage pay we,
 here in loving reverence bow;
 here for faith's discernment pray we
 lest we fail to know [him] now.

Alleluia!

[he is] here, we ask not how.

For his ways are higher than our ways. He knows a way to walk his body through a wall and a way to have his body and blood present for us under what appears to be but bread and wine. And still he remains the

Pascal Lamb, [his] offering, finished
 once for all when [he was] slain,
 in its fullness undiminished
 shall for evermore remain

Alleluia!

Cleansing souls from every stain.

That is what the Lord's Supper gives you: Jesus, who cleanses souls with the fruits of his cross, his own body and blood given and shed for the sins of the world. So worship the Lord at his footstool. Hasten back to adore and receive Jesus in his Supper as he bids you do it often and you will have

Life-imparting heavenly Manna,
stricken Rock with streaming side,
heaven and earth with loud hosanna
worship [him] the Lamb who died,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Risen, Ascended, Gloried.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Now the peace of God which passes all human understanding will keep your hearts and
minds in Christ Jesus.**