

Sunday Sermon: May 6, 2018

Sermon Text: Ephesians 4:7-16

Sermon Theme: Ascension: The Beginning

<sup>37</sup> But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. <sup>8</sup> This is why it says:

*“When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”*

<sup>9</sup> (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) <sup>11</sup> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

People mark time by beginnings and endings. The movie begins and the movie ends. Our day of work begins our day of work ends. Our life on earth begins, our life on earth ends. If something is good, we look forward to it beginning. We can’t wait for it to start. While it is going on, we may never want it to end. But, we also know that almost everything ends. If it’s fun we don’t want to see it go. We may even be sad.

But sometimes, the only way something new can happen is for something old to end. The only way a new and exciting area of Disneyland to open is when an older parts closes. Without ending one job, we may never pursue another job or career that we might love. Without one door closing another door may never have opened. There are many times that something ending can signal the beginning of something new and wonderful.

The disciples were ordinary people. They marked things with beginnings and endings just like we do. They marked the beginning of their ministry from when they started following Jesus. They saw Jesus’ first miracle at Cana. They marked the first Communion with Jesus on Maundy Thursday. There were many firsts for them, but now there was an ending.

Jesus was risen! He had appeared to them many times in the 40 days after Easter. The disciples might have thought that this was the way that it was going to go from now on. They might have thought that Jesus would end up being their commander and would send them out on Gospel missions.

But that was not Jesus’ plan. Jesus’ plan was something completely different. He would close the door on his earthly ministry and have them begin something new. As the disciples watched Jesus go, it must have felt like the end of something wonderful. But it wasn’t the end to anything. Jesus’ ascension was actually the beginning of something new and wonderful. Jesus’ ascension signals the first day of the rest of our lives.

Jesus’ ascension would have never happened without his descending. We need to understand the descending in order to really understand his ascension. Paul says, **“What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?”**

Jesus descending to earth is one of the most important things to happen to the human race ever. Our heavenly Father loved sinful people enough to send his own Son to earth.

Jesus descended to earth to do all the work that was necessary for sinful people like you and me to have heaven. He descended from the power and glory of his heavenly throne to be our servant and to lead us to the truth that would save us. As Paul says, he led those who were captives to sin from their prison and instead of giving them the punishment and condemnation that sin deserved, he declared them forgiven. He gave to us the eternal spiritual gifts of faith, forgiveness, life and salvation.

Jesus descending was very important for us, but his ascension is also important for us.

Jesus had descended to earth with a mission to accomplish: save sinful mankind. He has accomplished that mission on Good Friday. His earthly work of saving us was done 100%. Nothing more could be added to

it and nothing more needed to be added to it. In his resurrection, he showed that the price had been accepted, he had won. Jesus defeated sin, death and the devil, grave could not hold him. His earthly work of saving us was done.

Jesus' ascension into heaven is further proof that all that he had come to earth to do, was done. A football team does not leave the field with two minutes left on the clock because they are ahead. They leave when the game is done, when the clock reads zero and the victory has been secured. A good general will not declare a victory at the negotiating table if the negotiations are under way. He will stay there until the victory is won and a full surrender has been achieved, then he will declare his victory.

Jesus had won the full victory for us and now his earthy work of saving us was done. He could leave the field of battle because the battle was done. When Jesus ascended into heaven his work changed. Now Jesus works for us in different ways.

First, Jesus is preparing our place for us. At the beginning of our service we sang the hymn, on Christ's ascension I now build. At Easter we say that because he lives, we will live to, that includes an ascension, our ascension. Our ascension will be from this sinful world, to the perfect peaceful world of heaven. Even now Jesus is preparing our place in heaven where we will be with him forever.

Secondly, Jesus intercedes for us with the Father. Every time we sin, our Savior is standing by the Father's side reminding him that all of our sins have been forgiven. What a wonderful picture of grace and mercy that our Savior never tires of forgiving and showing the Father the forgiveness he gives to us.

Finally, as Jesus sits on his throne he rules over all things for the good of us his people. While we are walking on this earth, we are never alone. Our Savior watches over us, guiding us and guarding us along the way. He rules over all things so that his Kingdom will come in our hearts by faith and that his will be done. His good and gracious will is that all men will be saved and come to faith.

This final work of Jesus is the one that he has included his disciples and us in. Jesus ascension was really the first day of the rest of the disciples lives and ours because in his ascension Jesus shows us the work he wants us to do for him in spreading his Word.

Paul says: **But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up<sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**

This Savior who has ascended into heaven has important work for each of us to do. The one who trained the disciples and apostles for their work is the same one who has blessed us with spiritual gifts to make use of as we do his work on earth.

This must have come as a bit of a shock to the disciples who were used to having Jesus lead them directly. Jesus tells them the end was here. They probably didn't believe it until he starts ascending. It must have a shock to them to realize that Jesus was leaving them, he would not be around. Now, things were going to be different. Jesus would still be in charge of the work, but he would not be there for an immediate answer. The first day of the rest of the Apostles lives began with them seeing that they would be doing the work that Jesus had equipped them to do it. They would now be the preachers and teachers.

But this work was not just work for the apostles, this is work that all God's people join in on. It is Christ who builds us up in faith through the prophets and apostles in the Word. It is Christ, who builds us up when we hear that Word preached, taught and proclaimed truthfully and clearly by evangelists, pastors, and teachers. But our building up is for a reason, Paul says we will be built up in Christ, built us up in faith, so that we are prepared for acts of service.

Jesus provides us with these shepherds in our lives who guide us in his Word so that we can be built up in faith and become mature spiritual people. When we are built up in faith and standing firm in that faith, we will no longer be tossed about by the waves of an ever-changing spiritual world. We will not be spiritual light-weights not ready to stand in the ring against those we think are religiously smarter or stronger. Our faith is based on the strength of Jesus and it is he who makes us strong.

Mature people realize that they have work to do. Whether it is house work, yard work, or the work we do for a living work is a part of life. For many of us there was a time that we wanted to do the least amount of

work for the most pay possible. If we could get paid for watching TV or going to the movies, most of us would gladly take that job. Hopefully, we didn't carry this attitude into our careers.

Mature people understand that there is work to be done and we have to do it. We don't waste time, we're not unproductive or lazy in that work. Mature, spiritual people understand much the same thing with the work we do out of thanks for Jesus. Through the Gospel, we see that we have work to do and we do it. We don't want to be a group of Christian people who do the bare minimum of work possible because we realize that we are equipped and ready to do the work before us.

**Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

We are built into the body of Christ ready to do work. The disciples understood that their lives had changed. They were now the teachers instead of the learners. Their work was now to build up others in the body. Do we understand that we are learners, but we are also teachers? We are equipped with the Word of God to share that Word with others who need to hear. Are we willing to do the work that is there for us to do every day of our life?

Jesus ascension is really a beginning, a new beginning for his disciples and for us. The first day of our new life starts every morning. Every day, God gives us the opportunities to reach out with the Word, to let our light of faith shine. Just as the Apostles did, we will praise the Lord, thanking him that we can share in his work and gladly do it out of thanks to him. Amen.