

## THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

Acts 1:1-11; Luke 24:44-53  
June 5, 2011

The Rev. Peter C. Jacobson, STS  
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church  
Wichita, Kansas

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.  
Alleluia! Christ is risen!

***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

Bishop William Willimon, writes of being in New Haven, Connecticut, many years ago as a student in 1970, during the famous Black Panther trial. Though I was only eight years old, I have vivid memories of that era — of riots and demonstrations, of civil unrest, and of graphic images of the war in Vietnam, and the protests against it. It was a turbulent time for our country — time of strife and discord, that threatened to tear our society apart. For Willimon, much of the unrest of those days came to a focus during the trial of those Black Panther leaders. It was just at that time that he happened to attend a choral mass at a church near Yale University. A boy's choir was singing a great Ascension composition entitled, "*Deus Ascendit*," — God Has Gone Up. As Willimon sat there listening to those young voices, he found himself thinking, "*How appropriate. God has gone up. He has gone up and away. God has left us to our confusion. He has Abandoned us in the midst of the angry shouts of the mobs, the sound of gunfire and the rhetoric of the revolutionaries.*" God indeed has abandoned us.

But, as he sat there and continued to listen, Willimon realized that the boys were not singing "*Deus Abscondit*," which would mean God has *abandoned* us, but rather they sang "*Deus Ascendit*," God has *gone up*. And Willimon writes that the words of that choral piece led him to understand that ***God has not given up on us and abandoned us***. Rather the Ascension of Jesus signals that what Christ had ***begun on earth***, will be ***brought to completion in, and from, heaven***.

As we profess in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds: "*He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*" Jesus ascended ***not to abandon us***, but to ***complete what he began*** — now, through the work of the Holy Spirit, ***through his church — through his faithful people***.

Christ has ***not*** abandoned us, but he has ascended into heaven. From the right hand of the Father, he is still at work ***to rule with love and mercy***. Deus Ascendit. God has gone up — but he has ***not gone away***.

In an Ascension Day meditation, the great Swedish bishop, Bo Giertz, wrote:

*The Lord's ascension is a milestone...*

*Christ sits at the Father's side...*

*He is now the omnipresent Savior,*

*who can intervene anywhere with His saving presence...*

*It's because of [the ascension]*

*that we now know our Savior Jesus Christ,  
can pray to Him, and belong to Him.*

Berry College, of Rome, Georgia has the largest campus in America, which includes fields, forests and a mountain. The school was founded in 1902 by Martha Berry, for the purpose of enabling mountain youth to get a college education by working for their tuition. So, the school has had farms and factories on the campus where the students worked to pay their way. Among other things on the campus, there was a large barn, and Martha Berry ordered her architect to put a church spire on the barn, so that when the students worked in the mud and manure of the barnyard, or when they were sweating, working in the fields, they would *see their work as an expression of worship*. The spire was to be a constant reminder to them of *Christ's presence in them, and with them, wherever they were, in whatever their vocation*.

What a marvelous symbol. Because it is a common temptation for us to wonder about where Christ is in the midst of our everyday life. When we're working in the barnyard — so to speak — we sometimes get bogged down in the “manure.” Life can sometimes seem so very hum-drum and ordinary. And at other times, life can seem so very difficult. A loved one is sick — perhaps near death. You've lost your job, or you fear you may lose it. Your teenager is giving you grief, or making choices that are unwise or even dangerous. And we may wonder, “*Where is God? Where is Christ is all this? Has he just abandoned me?*”

Though the Lord Jesus is no longer physically present among us as he was with his disciples, in a certain, profound sense, he is actually *more present* among us now, than he was 2000 years ago.

Now Christ is with us in the *Proclamation of the Word* of repentance and forgiveness in his name.

Now he is with us in the *sacraments*: in the *Bath* that washes us clean and grafts us into his family, and in the *Meal* that sustains us and gives us his very flesh and blood to eat and drink.

And, Christ is present in our *Assembly*. Jesus is present in the *church*, which is his very Body. And that means he is present in *us* — he's present in you and me — the *members* of his Body — even as the apostle points out in today's Second Reading.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian mystic, Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), wrote:

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours;  
yours are the only hands with which he can do his work  
yours are the only feet with which he can go about the world.  
Yours are the only eyes through which his compassion  
can shine forth upon a troubled world.*

*Christ has no body now on earth but **yours**.*

Christ is Ascended. **He has gone up, but not away.** That is good news of comfort for us, because we've not been abandoned. But it's also a word of **commissioning** and **purpose**. Because if the world is to see Christ today, **now it must see him in you and me.** Now the world **must see Christ in his Body, the Church.**

Deus Ascendit. God has gone up — but not away.

Jesus ascended **not to abandon us**, but to **complete what he began** — to complete what he began through the power of the Holy Spirit — **through his church — through his faithful people** — through you and through me.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.