

Ephesians 1:20-23

Sixth Sunday of Easter (Series C)

Lessons for the Day: Acts 16:9-15; Revelation 21:9-14; 21-27; John 16:23-33

Our Exalted Lord: He Rules in Power!

May 26, 2019

“[God] seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

This coming Thursday, the church will again remember a day that is often forgotten or ignored in our world today. It is the Feast of the Ascension, as we remember that the Saviour, who came from heaven to redeem all of lost and sinful mankind, has returned to His heavenly home. Pastor Eric talked about the ascension last week, as we continue our look at the Steps of Exaltation in the Apostles’ Creed. Now we rejoice that Christ, as Victor, sits at the right hand of the Father, ruling over all things in heaven and on earth for the sake of His Church. This is the source of great comfort and hope for us as the people of God. The Augsburg Confession, the statement of faith read before Emperor Charles V as a testimony to all the Lutheran Church believes, teaches and confesses declares: *“There He forever reigns and has dominion over all creatures. He sanctifies those who believe in Him, by sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts to rule, comfort, and make them alive. He defends them against the devil and the power of sin”* (AC III 4-5)

Our hope, our peace, and our confidence in this world all flow from the assurance that Christ, who was crucified for us and who rose again from the dead is now sitting at the right hand of God. The Lord who loved us and who died for us; the Lord who is the victor over sin, death and the grave; the Lord who has *“all authority in heaven and on earth”* (Matthew 28:18, ESV) is the Lord who uses that authority and power for the sake of His people in His Church.

Brenda and I were in London, Ontario last weekend for the wedding of our son, and to spend some time with our children and grandchildren. We were talking with our granddaughters on our last day in London, reminding them that Grandma and Papido, as they call me, had to return to Calgary. That didn’t seem to bother them that much, but after we were here for two days and talking over the phone, Avery, our oldest granddaughter asked, “When are you coming home?” She wanted us to come back—although I’m sure its because Papido gives her treats, and Grandma is much easier to deal with than mommy.

In a similar way, in our Gospel lesson today, we see Jesus talking to His disciples before His crucifixion, and telling them that He is soon going to leave them and return to the Father in heaven. Being a little more mature than my granddaughters, and knowing what this meant, it must have been a sad thought for them. It wasn’t any easier when Jesus declared *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation.* Thankfully, He doesn’t end there. He assures them: *But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33, ESV)

This is the glorious hope we have, that: *[God] seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.* The right hand of God is not so much a place as the recognition that Christ has all the power and majesty of God, ruling with supreme authority. Peter declares that *“Christ has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.”* (1 Peter 3:22, ESV) As Stephen, the first Christian martyr was being taken to his death, we are told: *“But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”* (Acts 7:55, ESV) Throughout the Scriptures we can find testimony to the fact that Christ is at the Father’s right hand. Of course, Jesus was always King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He, who is the Second Person of the Trinity, who is equal with the Father in all things, has always had all power in heaven and on earth. Yet it was hard to see that kingship when Jesus sets aside His crown during His earthly ministry. When Jesus was on trial before Pilate, Pilate asked Him: *“Are you the King of the Jews?”* (John 18:33, ESV) Jesus tells Pilate: *“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”* (John 18:36, ESV) The Roman guards put a purple cloth on Christ, and put that crown of thorns on His head. They bowed in mock allegiance before Him, *“And they began to salute him, “Hail, King of the Jews!”* (Mark 15:18, ESV), as they slapped and beat Him. The charge against Jesus which Pilate put on the cross was a taunt at the Jewish leaders, and while Pilate may not have believed it, it declared the truth: *“It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”* (John 19:19, ESV)

Now the ascended Christ takes His rightful place as Lord of all. The crown of thorns has been replaced with the royal diadem that declares His authority and majesty. The mocking cries of the guards and the crowds gives way to the glorious song of the whole heavenly host—the angels and the saints together—who praise Him as Saviour and Lord of all. He is given that name above every name. Everything in heaven and on earth is under His command, as He rules over all things.

Christ’s mission for our salvation is accomplished. No longer is He the humble Servant; He is the exalted Lord. In His glorified state everything that was always true of Him as God is now true of Him also as Man. Even as He reigns in heaven, this glorified Lord is able to be present bodily in many different places at the same time in the Sacrament of His Supper.

The exaltation and kingship of Jesus not only bring glory to Him; this is a source of great comfort for us. Think again of that word of Jesus in the Gospel lesson: ***“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*** (John 16:33, ESV).

The King who sits at the right hand of the Father rules this hectic world with you in mind, for you confess His name. He intercedes for you, bringing your needs and requests to the Father, and working to answer them in accordance with His wise, perfect, holy will. When your problems are many, and when your faith is weak, He is not just a far-away or unapproachable King, but the One who works for your good in all things. John is given the Revelation of the Lord’s victory, and tells what he sees: ***“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”*** (Revelation 11:15, ESV) In our text, Paul assures us that Christ reigns forever and ever as ***head over all things to the church***. His reign is for our benefit! There is no corruption; no self-serving attitudes; no misguided decisions in His reign. He works everything for the sake of His church. That doesn’t mean that He does everything that we think might be best. He does what is best.

Yes, in this world we have trouble. The devil is at work in the world, teaching the world to hate the people of God and all they represent. We see the devil’s evil influence in our lives. He works in countless ways to tempt us and mislead us. He tries to make our lives miserable with a thousand different ailments, misfortunes, troubles and worries. We see him at work in the attitudes of society today.

The problem, at least as we often perceive it, is that the devil is at work here in this world—but the Saviour has ascended into heaven. Thankfully, from His throne on high, the King watches over us. Remember why He came into this world in the first place. He saw what was happening. He knew full well what sin was doing to His beloved people. He knows that we, too, are sinners, doomed to destruction because we are enslaved by the devil. But, we are assured in Scripture: ***“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”*** (Hebrews 2:14–15, ESV) He came to do more than just protect us from the devil. He came to deliver us from sin, death and hell itself. His death is the price of our freedom. His resurrection is the assurance that we, too, shall live. Until that day, His ascension and His seat at the right hand of the Father are our assurance that He is watching over all things in heaven and earth, working everything together for the good of His people.

In this world we have trouble, but Christ, the Exalted Lord has overcome the world. He has the power, the authority and the wisdom to bring all things together for our good. There is no greater comfort for us than knowing that He, who took all of our sins and all of their consequences upon Himself and put them to death in His own body on the cross, is the Exalted Lord, who rules in power for the sake of His people. He rules for His church—and you and I, as His baptized people, are part of that church. Harper was given her citizenship this morning, too! Yes, Christ has gone into heaven, but He still remains with us and does everything for our benefit. He works through His Word and through His Sacraments to bless and sustain us, and to prepare us for the work He gives us to do as His ambassadors in this fallen world.

The day is coming (and we’ll actually talk about that next Sunday) when the Lord will come again and bring His people to the perfect peace and joy of His eternal kingdom. Until that day, we live in this fallen world, with its worries and cares. But this world is not a forsaken world. The Lord of glory is above ***all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come***. Nothing can defeat Him. Nothing can deter His plans. Nothing can keep Him from ruling in perfect wisdom, love and grace for the sake of His church, and that means for you, His dear children. Amen.