

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

24th May 2020 – Ascension Day

EPHESIANS 1:19-23

LIFTED UP IN LOVE AND POWER

Happy Ascension Day! No, that doesn't sound quite right. Merry Ascension Day! No, doesn't really seem to fit either, and I'm feeling that I am probably starting to get blank looks from some of you. Today we are celebrating Ascension Day, well actually Ascension Day was last Thursday because it's 40 days after Easter Sunday. But, because unlike Christmas and Easter it doesn't have public holidays or special services, we celebrate it today. For such an important day, it doesn't have a lot of things to help us remember it. Can any of you think of your favourite Ascension Day hymn or song? There's no giving of presents, or chocolate eggs, or family get togethers, or big feasts. As a day, and an event which is so important for us as Christians, Ascension Day is the forgotten festival and so often just flies under our radar.

What's it all about? As I said before, Ascension Day always falls on a Thursday because it commemorates an event which the Bible tells us happened 40 days after Easter Sunday. After Jesus had risen from the dead, for 40 days He continued going around teaching, eating with, and been seen by His followers and many others. And then, to complete His work here on earth, He took His disciples out to a hill and while they were watching He was lifted up into heaven. It was the final finish of all Jesus had been sent down to do.

There are five parts of Jesus' life on earth which define who He really was, and if we take any of the five out the others don't mean anything. Any ideas what they are? They are; His Incarnation, or when Mary conceived this child by the power of the Holy Spirit; Jesus' Birth as a human being, God come into this world as one of us; His Death on the cross, where, as a human, God died for the sins of us all; His Resurrection, when He showed that God is stronger than death and the grave, and that because He lives we also will live; and now, to top

it all off, Jesus' Ascension back into heaven, to sit at the right side of God and to be given power over all things. Five events which show both the Divine and Human side of Jesus, and five events also which show both the love and the power of God in our world and in our lives.

The description of the actual events of that first Ascension Day are given to us in both Acts chapter one and Luke chapter 24; have a look at them if you want a refresher on the story. Here in the beginning of the letter to the Ephesians Paul gives us an insight into why it is so important for us that Jesus was raised up into heaven. Firstly, this event shows us that now Jesus has the absolute power of God. Paul writes; ‘¹⁹I want you to know about the great and mighty power that God has for us followers. It is the same wonderful power he used²⁰ when he raised Christ from death and let him sit at his right side in heaven.²¹ There Christ rules over all forces, authorities, powers, and rulers. He rules over all beings in this world and will rule in the future world as well.’ (*Ephesians 1:19-21 CEV*) Jesus lived a very humble life, and a life of obedience to His Father. He carried out all that His Father sent Him to do, all that God had been promising He would do to save us and bring us back to Him. Now, with this role completed, Jesus is raised up to the right hand of the Father, and given power over everything. The One who was born as one of us, who knows all that we now go through, is also the One who now sits in heaven with complete power and authority over everything.

And Ascension Day also shows us, again, that in Jesus we see such a great demonstration of the love of God. Again, here is what Paul writes, ‘²²God has put all things under the power of Christ, and for the good of the church he has made him the head of everything.²³The church is Christ's body and is filled with Christ who completely fills everything.’ (*Ephesians 1:22-23 CEV*) How does God use this power, which He now also gives to Jesus? He uses it to help us, God's people, Jesus' body, the Church; to serve us, to bring us to Him, to work through us each day. Jesus' Ascension shows us how great God's love for us is; Jesus was conceived as one of us, was born in a humble way, lived a life like us with all its

joys and sorrows, died a very real and painful death in our place, was raised again having overcome Satan and the grave, and now, at the end of it all, is raised up in glory. The story of Jesus' life on earth, from conception to ascension, is a love story; a story of God's great love for us, of Jesus' love for the Father, and of Jesus' love for us. The three are entwined together. It's a love story we see throughout the whole Bible, in the life of Jesus, and in our lives also.

Happy Ascension Day! Or however the greeting works for you. It is a day when we really focus on God's love and power; two words we don't normally use together but which both show out here. God's love in ending the story of all Jesus did to forgive us and bring us back to Him. God's power in now putting Jesus as the ultimate power over all things, a power He uses for the good of us, His Church, and for God's kingdom. Because of all Jesus did, we know that this is a love and a power which is now with us, and works through us, each day also. Amen.

Prayer: Lord God, we thank you for all that you did for us through the life of Jesus, and especially showing your love and power in Him. By your Holy Spirit, help us to live in your love and allow your power to work through us. Amen.

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

Please now either reflect on the below points by yourself, or discuss them with others you are with, or online, to consider a bit more what it means for us that the love and power of God were shown in Jesus' Ascension.

Coming Down in Love and Humility

Many of us would probably use the words 'love' and 'humility' to describe the earthly life of Jesus. These are probably mostly thought of in the 'big' events like Jesus' birth and death.

- Think of some other events of Jesus' life which show His humility and His love for us.
Are there any favourite examples for you which immediately spring to mind?

- What do all these events tell us about Jesus? His relationship to the Father? His relationship to us?
- Why are love and humility such important characteristics of Jesus as our Saviour?

Going Up in Power and Glory

We know that Jesus, as the Son of God and a part of the Trinity, always was and always will be, but that around 2,000 years ago He came to earth for a brief time to carry out God's plan to save us. During this time on earth He was both God and human.

- What are some of the stories of Jesus' life which remind you of that Jesus had the power of God? Are there any which are favourites of yours?
- These stories showed that Jesus had power over many things; the physical world, the devil, life and death, sickness, the rulers and authorities of this world. Can you think of stories which are examples of all of these?
- Why is it important to us that Jesus as our Saviour was taken back to heaven in glory and given all the power of the Father?

Celebrating Ascension Day

A bit of a lighter one: Try and come up with some ways we can give Ascension Day more of a focus and importance than it currently has, and would help teach people the significance of this event in Jesus' life.

- Can you think of an Ascension Day event we could hold or run which would fit in well?
- Is there an Ascension Day greeting we could all use?
- A symbol for Ascension Day?
- Any other ways to give this event more prominence?

*Pastor Andrew Koehler
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