

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Ascension, 2014
Mark 16.19

Part I

It had been a *good* number of weeks. Jesus had spent some special time with his disciples. It was time spent with them, *after* their lives had been turned upside down. They were on Good Friday. That day, their Lord was crucified, dead, and buried. As a result, sadness, fears and doubts had gotten the best of the disciples.

Then, on Sunday, they began to get news that Jesus' tomb was empty. Some of the women said at the tomb an angel told them Jesus had risen. On account of their “unbelief and hardness of heart,” [!supportFootnotes\]-->\[1\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) though, they thought the news was bogus. The women must have been “seeing things.” Their minds must have played tricks on them.

Later that day, in the evening, they gathered together. They bolted the doors. They wanted to keep Jesus' enemies out. Then, suddenly, Jesus stood in their midst. They rubbed their eyes. *They* must be seeing things. They weren't. Jesus showed them his nail marked hands and spear marked side. The women were right. It was true. Jesus *did* rise from the dead.

Thomas was not there that night. When Thomas heard Jesus rose, *he* did not believe it. A week passed. It was Sunday evening, again. Again, the disciples gathered together, Thomas, too. Again, they bolted the doors. Again, Jesus took in their midst. This time Jesus told Thomas *to put his finger* in his spear marked side and nail marked hands. Thomas knew, then, they weren't seeing things. It *was* for real. Jesus *had* risen.

These were the first two of a number of times Jesus showed himself alive to the disciples. For a period of forty days, Jesus continued to give

proof that he had risen from the dead. Sin, death and the devil were defeated. He came back the victor. He won.

Now, its forty days after the resurrection. It was time for Jesus to visibly depart. He speaks parting words. He tells the disciples to preach the gospel; to baptize. Then, before their very eyes, they see Jesus ascend. A cloud takes him out of sight.

On the other side, a host waited. Angels and saints lined the streets in heaven. The king was coming home. As he passed by, the heavenly host cheered. They waved palm branches in their hands. The king was crowned. He sat on his throne to shouts of joy. The very heavens shook in celebration.

Part II

So, that leads us to wonder: Since Jesus is in heaven, what good does that do us, who are left in this world? That is: *Where* in the world is he when we need him?

It is a question we have to deal with. We have to, because God *does* seem absent. Just read the news and that's the conclusion man arrives at. He does because there is so much evil in the world. Recently, for example, we heard of drive by shootings in California; the terrorist kidnappings in Nigeria remain unresolved; unrest and fighting are only intensifying in the Ukraine.

In our own lives we have enough bad to deal with, too. Our bodies hurt from injury and illness, limiting us from doing what we like to do. Rising prices at the grocery store make it harder and harder to keep up with the bills. People seem to be on edge; on edge at work; one edge at home. The blues get the best of us. We feel down and out. It gets hard to pick ourselves up and keep going some days. Fears box us in. They keep us from our potential. We can't break free.

At such times we think that God must be far removed from us. He must be in heaven, distant from us. Its why, at times, we ask, "Where *is* God when I need him?"

At the Father's right hand; *that's* where God is. The Father's right hand is *not so much a place* as it is a *position*. It is a position of *power*. At his ascension, Jesus said, "All authority is given to me." [!supportFootnotes-->\[2\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) That is *absolute* power. It's the power Jesus has *from eternity* as God. It's the power Jesus has as Man *after* he sat at the Father's right hand.

From this position of power, then, Jesus can do *all* things. That's why he can promise "I am with you always." In another place he puts that promise this way "Where two or three are gathered in my name, *there* am I in the midst of them." [!supportFootnotes-->\[3\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) Gathered in Jesus' name; gathered around word and sacrament, Jesus stands in our midst.

Jesus stands in our midst not only as God, but also as Man. You see, you can't divide Jesus' person. Where God is there the Man is. The God/Man, Jesus, is among us, then. Here, Jesus speaks to us. He does in the preaching of the gospel. Here Jesus gives you his body and blood. He does in the sacrament.

Truly is he with you. He is to tell you. "I paid for your redemption with my blood. You are mine. I stand by your side in bad times. I uphold you by my righteous right hand. You are safe in my hands."

That's where this king is. He is with you in word and sacrament – not just as God, but in his whole person, God and Man. After all, he can do all things.

Part III

That leads us to another question: Why did Jesus go to the Father's right hand? That is: Why did Jesus not stay *here* so we can visibly see him?

He didn't, because *here* is a world broken by sin. We feel that in our homes. That is, our homes the effects of sin. A popular word to describe that is "dysfunctional." Dysfunction is a result of power struggles; emotional abuse; enabling addictive behaviors. They all tear at the fabric

of home life. When it comes down to it, it's about "Me, My-self and I". Ego puts self before others in the home. Others get hurt in the process.

What's more, the treasures we store up at home are not forever. The clothes we buy fades, frays and gets worn. We get rid of old clothes. We get new clothes. The food we buy spoils, turns rancid, grows mold. We recoil when we open it. It gets tossed. The cars we buy suffer from wear and tear. The continued stress takes a toll. The engines fail.

Our lives are not forever. Every sickness is a little sign that is it so. Years of work wear our bodies down. Body parts falter. Body parts break. Eventually our bodies stop working.

Any attempts to fix this world are band-aids. Under the band-aid, the wound festers; turns fatal; and takes life. It does, because sin is the cause.

That's why Jesus went to the Fathers' right hand. He went there to get a room ready for you. He says so, "In my Fathers' house are many rooms. I go there to prepare a place for you that where I am you also may be." [\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[4\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) Imagine that! In your heavenly Fathers house there is a room reserved for you. It's your own room. It has your name on it. That room will never fade, spoil or perish. It will last and last and last; forever.

There, you will be a part of God's family. In that place and in that family there will be no dysfunction; no sin that divides; no power struggles; no abusive behavior; no enabling. Everyone will get along; be happy for one another's success. It will be a perfect place; a perfect family.

The way to this house is Jesus. "I am the way." [\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[5\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) The way is Jesus' cross. There Jesus shouldered your sin; he took it way. Taken away, one day, Jesus will take you on his shoulders and bring you into his glorious home.

That's why we no longer see Jesus. He went to prepare a place for you. It's a place not ruined by sin, but a perfect place.

That leads us to our final question: How do you know this is for you? That is, when you stand face to face with eternity, *in what* do you put your confidence?

The confidence we need can easily be shaken. It can be, because sin shakes it. Sin divides us from God. It puts us at odds with God. We end up on bad terms with God. When we feel our sin, then, our confidence is shaken. When our guilt weighs us down, we feel that we have sinned away God's grace.

When we do, then we think we have to do something about it. One way we do that is by punishing ourselves. That is, we think we have to feel bad enough. If we feel bad enough, then God might show us mercy. So, we beat ourselves up. We pile on the guilt. We put ourselves through the wringer.

Or, we put our faith under a microscope. We focus on our faith. We agonize over it. We wonder if we have enough faith; if we have the right kind of faith; if we have any faith at all. We think, then, that it is about us getting more faith.

All of these ways shake your confidence. They do, because they are putting confidence in the wrong place; in man. If that is where you put your confidence, you will never have the confidence you need. You will always call faith into question.

For that reason Jesus goes to bat for you at the Father's right hand. God's word says, "If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." [6](#) In other words, the blood of Jesus pleads for you. That blood says, "I have paid the price for your sins. The fact that I sit at the Father's right hand is proof that the Father accepted my life as payment. Your sins are forgiven you."

In other words, you are not directed to how much you feel sorry for your sins; neither are you directed to the size of your faith. Those are all about you attempting to do something; something you cannot do. No.

God's word does not direct you to your fickle self. God's word gives you Jesus; it gives you gospel promises.

Those very promises stand you in Jesus – no matter the size of your faith. Jesus is the object of your faith – not how much you beat yourself up. Stand in him; and you have *all* the confidence you need. You do, because *Jesus* is your confidence. “At the right hand of God he makes intercession for you.” [<!--\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[7\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) His blood avails for you.

Part V

So it was that on Ascension Day Jesus sat at the Father's right hand. That does not mean he is absent. Not at all! Making full use of his power, he is with you in your troubles. Nor does it mean that you are left without hope in a broken world. He went before you to prepare a place for you in his Father's house. Nor does it leave you to despair of your sin. The fact that Jesus sits at the Father's right hand is proof that your sins are paid for. Jesus is your confidence. **That is your comfort at Jesus' ascension.**

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[<!--\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[1\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) Mark 16.14

[<!--\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[2\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) Matthew 28.18

[<!--\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[3\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) Matthew 18.20

[<!--\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[4\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) John 14.2,3 condensed

[<!--\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[5\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) John 14.6

[<!--\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[6\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) I John 2.1

[<!--\[if !supportFootnotes\]-->\[7\]<!--\[endif\]-->](#) Romans 8.34