

Rev. Dan Welch Ascension 5-18-23 Text- Ephesians 1: 15-23

A man was writing about a scene he had witnessed in the mountains of Colorado. He was driving uphill along a major interstate when he overtook a long freight train moving in the same direction, but at a slower speed. The train was being pushed by two locomotive engines that sounded as if they were straining at full power. As someone who was from the Great Plains of the Midwest, he was kind of surprised by this. He thought, "Is this how they move trains in the mountains? Just two engines pushing all that weight?"

A few minutes later he came alongside the front of the long string of cars. There he saw five more locomotives pulling the train. Seven engines in all. And when he saw that he came to a huge realization. You see, he had been under a lot of stress for some time. He was feeling tired, worn out, and wondering whether he could keep going under all the pressure. It suddenly dawned on him that his life was a lot like that train. In his life, he felt like he was pushing a load uphill with all his might. He felt like his energy was about to run out. He had forgotten that God was there, that Christ was there, in the lead, in front of his life, pulling with power far greater than his own strength. Jesus was there, pulling him through the valleys and mountains of life, and his Lord would always be there.

That is the message of Ascension. The word "ascension" comes from the event talked about in our Bible readings for today, the event in Jesus' life that took place 40 days after Easter. The main lesson to learn from the ascension of Christ is this: Now, He's everywhere.

What are the top four events in Jesus' life? Well, of course there's His birth, His death, His resurrection. And finally, His ascension. 40 days after Jesus rose from the dead, He gathered some of His followers on a mountain, He spoke to them, and then He physically began to rise into the air, until a cloud hid Him from their sight. Why did Jesus do this? And what does this mean for us today? We find the answers to these questions as we consider God's Word for this evening.

Remember, there was a time when Jesus would only be in one place at a time. During His life, before Easter, Jesus would walk, eat, and sleep, just like everyone else. We call that time Jesus' state of humiliation when Jesus humbled Himself and did not make full use of His divine power.

Then came Easter. Now, Jesus was beginning to make full use of His divine power again. This is part of His state of exaltation. Now, He wouldn't always walk and sleep like everyone else. He still had a human body, but things

were different now. Jesus had risen from the dead. He spent 40 days appearing to His followers, one place at a time, to prove to them that He really had physically risen from the dead.

But now, it was time for that to end. It was time for Jesus to stop being in just one place at a time. It was time for Jesus to be fully glorified again, just as He was before He was born. It was time for things to be different.

Why? Why didn't Jesus just stay on this earth? That would have meant trouble for you and me. If Jesus would have stayed, what would it have been like to be a Christian? Everyone with an illness would be competing with each other, trying to get healed by Him. Remember, if Jesus would have stayed, you could only find Him in one place at a time. Everyone would have been competing with each other, trying to get noticed by Him. We'd all want Him to solve our problems, to provide world peace, to stop wars, to cause our relatives to come to church with us. What do you think your chances of talking to Him would have been? Even if every one of us would only get 20 seconds with Jesus, that would mean that only about a million and a half people a year would get some time with Him – and the rest of us would have to wait.

The ascension marks the end of Jesus' visible presence on earth when He's only in one place at time. The ascension marks the beginning of His **invisible** presence on this earth when He's everywhere at the same time. Remember what heard a few moments ago from the book of Ephesians? "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." Look at the last part of that sentence. When Jesus ascended into heaven, that was the moment that He began to fill everything in every way.

Now when you pray to Christ, and someone else in Africa prays to Christ, He is with you and listening to you, and He's with that person in Africa and listening to him. He knows and answers both of your prayers at the same time. When you are traveling across the country, Christ is with you. But he's also with your relatives back home. Now, He's everywhere. The Bible tells us that He fills everything in every way. How can that be? Remember, Jesus is God, and if He's God, He can do whatever He wants.

Is this good or bad, that Jesus is with you and watches you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week? Maybe there's a part of us that doesn't like to hear that, because that means that He sees us when we sin. He's always with you. He's always watching you, listening to you. He knows exactly what's going on with you,

24/7, because He fills everything in every way. Does that make you kind of uncomfortable? Does that make you feel guilty?

Remember, the Jesus who is always with you, is the Jesus who died for your sins. You can always turn to Him, confess the sins that you have committed, and know that He forgives you, every time. Every time you stumble and fall in your Christian walk, Jesus is right there, to lift you up, and to strengthen you to become the Christian that you want to be. Every time you hear the Word of God, Jesus is right there. It is He who is speaking to you, not just the pastor. Every time you receive the Lord's Supper, Jesus is there, not just the pastor giving you Christ's body and blood with the bread and wine, telling you that your sins are forgiven.

That's the kind of Savior you have. You don't have a Savior who sits up in heaven, far away from you, who's usually too busy to pay attention to you. "Maybe if I pray hard enough and long enough, He'll pay attention to me." That's not the kind of God you have.

You have a God who is with you right now. Who came down to this earth 2000 years ago and became a human being. You have a God who died for you, who took your sins away. And instead of ascending up into heaven and leaving the world, He ascended into heaven and now fills every inch of the world. Instead of being up there all by Himself relaxing, away from you, He is down here with you, working in your life, blessing you and guiding you. That's the kind of God you have. You never have to ask, "Where is God?" He fills everything in every way. He is with you right now, tomorrow, and always, and that is the message of the Ascension. Amen.