

We Believe, Teach, and Confess

The Newsletter of the Scarville/Center Lutheran Parish

Pastor Thomas L. Rank
May 2016
Ascension/PENTECOST

An Ascension Sermon

Pastor Thomas Rank
Preached May 13, 2016

Text: Acts 1:9-11

Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.¹⁰ And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,¹¹ who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

The Ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven is a great gift for you. By His Ascension 40 days after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus demonstrates that everything promised for the salvation of the world is complete. He goes to heaven to show that you, too, will go to heaven. He goes to bring us to that perfect place of peace and joy, to be with our God forever. The Spirit revealed this to St. John with this word:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."⁴ "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

(Revelation 21:1-4 NKJ)

This is the place to which Jesus promises to bring those who believe in Him, those who receive by faith the great victory of grace and forgiveness which He has won.

For truly heaven is not our destination or our home if left to rise there on our own. We cannot ascend to heaven like Jesus. We cannot because without Jesus we are massive lumps of lead, or worse, of slag, the unusable remains of the processing of iron ore. The best we can do is sink. That is what sin does.

Christ's Ascension is the work of Jesus to show you that all that He did through His human life here on earth, His

perfect keeping of all of divine law, His burdened life as He carried the dead weight of sin, ours and all the world's, His suffering, His dying on the cross, and His resurrection—all these are shown to be fully and completely and freely done. Not for Him. But for you. And since all of that is for you, the very fact that He can rise to heaven shows that the way is there for you, too.

This is way is followed through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith plus nothing. Trusting in all that Jesus did for you, no matter your sin. Listen to this wonderful description of Jesus' work:

Christ, having paid our debts on the cross and give us a guarantee of this payment in the resurrection, went before us in His ascension and prepared the way, swept aside the great murderous spirits, highwaymen, the devil, death, and hell, and cleared the way of every hindrance. We are here on the great and stormy sea of this sorrowful world, where various waves and strong winds meet our eyes. For us to get out of this danger unscathed and make land, we must have One who stands on the other shore and offers us His hands, that we may cross unharmed to the shore of the heavenly fatherland. And that is Jesus Christ, our dear Lord, who stoops down to let us climb up on His holy, divine back, and in this way carries us to eternal life in heaven (Spangenberg).

So how is it that He stoops down to us and carries us? He does so as He visits us with His saving Word of the Gospel and the blessed sacraments of free grace. His word is spoken to you with all the power and truth by which the very creation was made. God said "let there be light," and there was light. God says to you: "You are forgiven." And guess what He means by that? That's right: you are forgiven. He is not fooling you. He is not adding conditions or secret escape clauses for Himself. No. When God speaks, He speaks truth, the same truth throughout time, salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

That same true and powerful word is at work in the Sacrament of the Altar, as well. Jesus is not lying or speaking symbolically when He says of the bread and the wine: This is My body, This is My blood. He means it, and He means it for you, for the remission of your sins.

Now there are various attempts to try and figure out how Jesus does this, that is, how is body and blood are here even though He ascended into heaven. Some will conclude: well, He just means He's here as God, not as true man since His human body cannot be everywhere, so it is just up in heaven next to God the Father. Or maybe Jesus expects us to receive Him only spiritually, not with His really true Body and Blood. Or maybe we ascend spiritually ourselves in the Supper to receive His heavenly body and blood in some insubstantial, non-physical way. And we can find other ways that try and figure out how Jesus really cannot mean the bread and wine here and now are His Body and Blood even though He ascended.

What is the problem with each of these? They do not take the word of Jesus to mean what He says. Instead of allowing Jesus' words to rule our faith, these various human ideas attempt to constrain the ways of Jesus to our human ability to figure things out. I suggest to you that that is a bad idea. In fact, I will do more than suggest. Just don't do it. Once you start down the path of presuming that God's ways must somehow be boxed in by what our human minds can figure out, then we will start wondering about creation, about the incarnation itself, which means salvation through the work of the God-man begins to unravel.

We hear what God says. We take Him at His word, and we trust Him, despite the fact that there are so many things we cannot make sense of with our reason, our thinking. This is our confession in the familiar words of the communion hymn, "Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness."

*Human reason, though it ponder,
Cannot fathom this great wonder,
That Christ's body e'er remaineth
Though it countless souls sustaineth,
And that He His blood is giving
With the wine we are receiving.
These great mysterious unsounded
Are by God alone expounded. (ELH 328:6)*

Jesus' human body ascended into heaven? Yes. Still everywhere present due to the union of the divine and human natures of Jesus in the Second Person of God? Yes. Able to solve this as a mathematical equation? No. We believe it to be so because we trust the Word Jesus speaks to us. We trust not only that He is present with us, but He comes to give us remission of our sins. With that remission of sins comes justification, our declaration of being perfectly right with God. With that comes heaven, with Jesus' promise that He does not leave, forsake, forget, deny, you who believe in Him.

The Ascension is the wonderful way that Jesus shows the road is clear of all debris, the highway has no roadwork to block our journey, eternal life is yours. God grant you peace and comfort by His word of promise. Amen.

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What we believe, teach, and confess about the work of God the Holy Spirit:

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; just as He calls gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives me and all believers all our sins; and at the last day He will raise up me and all the dead, and will grant me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.

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Anniversary Planning 2017 & 2018

Some big anniversaries for our parish are just around the corner. Here are some thoughts about them, and also some brainstorming at our meeting on April 10th at which eight of us were present to begin our planning.

1. These anniversaries are important.

The first one, in 2017, celebrates the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. This is quite literally a worldwide event. Officially it will be on October 31st, 2017, the date often assigned to the beginning of the Reformation, when Martin Luther posted 95 *Theses* on the church door in Wittenberg, Electoral Saxony (Germany). These 95 statements written so as to facilitate discussion about the current situation of the church, led to far deeper discussion, heated debate, and even threats against Luther's life. The theses showed that all was not well in the church (as many already knew). They would lead to decades of further study and discussion on Biblical teachings central to the Christian faith, especially the truth that we are saved by God's grace alone (justification), through faith alone (no works), in Scripture alone (only the Bible is the authority in the church), by Christ alone.

The second one, in 2018, celebrates the centennial of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS); and also gives us reason to celebrate the centennials of the congregations that make up our parish: Scarville (established 1918) and Center (established 1919). I do not anticipate a world-wide celebration of these events. However, they are important for us to remember for the cause of the truth of God's Word in our own country, and in our own local area.

Winnebago County, Iowa, is where our ELS began, with its organizing convention in a rural church named Lime Creek Lutheran Church (just five or so miles east of our own parish). The date was June 14th, 1918. The second convention was in Albert Lea, Minnesota, May 29-June 4, 1919.

Why did the ELS begin in 1918? It was the result of a decades-long discussion on the teaching of divine election, and it boiled down to the question: what role does a man have in his own election to eternal life? The compromise document (*The Madison Agreement* of 1912) at the heart of the disagreement allowed and insisted upon human responsibility for one's own election: in other words, not grace (God's mercy) alone. A large minority of the old Norwegian Synod (est. 1853) could not agree to the doctrinal compromises represented by The Madison Agreement. They objected strenuously, but finally only a few (13 pastors and their congregations, out of) were determined enough not to join in the merger of three Norwegian Lutheran synods in 1917. This led to our many of our own members leaving their former congregations in Scarville and Center Township, beginning new congregations, and joining the new "reorganized" Norwegian Synod of 1918 (which later became the ELS).

(For further study I recommend Pastor Jerome Gernander's essay, *The Drive to Oppjor: the Years 1900-1917 in the Old Norwegian Synod*, available here: <http://www.angelfire.com/ny4/djw/lutherantheology.gernanderoppjor.html> (or ask Pastor Rank for a copy)

It is well to keep in mind the exhortation of Pastor Christian Anderson, who wrote in 1953 about the reasons for remembering these events—it is about truth, the truth of God's Word, and our continued desire to teach, confess, and believe it faithfully.

Our purpose in considering these things is not chiefly to satisfy our curiosity and to evaluate the weaknesses of our fathers and former brethren. **But it should serve as a lesson for us**, who are still exposed to the same dangers as they were. And it will help us also to understand the problems of other synods; for, as The Preacher says, 'There is nothing new under the sun.' History is sure to repeat itself in so many ways. The arch enemy of the saving truth will use pretty much the same tactics at all times, to rob us of this truth, though they

may appear in somewhat different form as the occasion demands. The Lord protect us against his machinations. ("Underlying Causes of the Deterioration and Breakdown of the Old Norwegian Synod," a Norwegian Synod General Pastoral Conference essay printed in Clergy Bulletin, September 1953, Vol. 13, p. 6)

2. **Let us not take for granted the confession of the truth in our own day**, nor neglect to be thankful to our Savior for the faithfulness of those who have gone before us, in the centuries since the Reformation, and in the past decades of our own history.

3. **Some ideas:**

- a. Special services (in 2017: Synod, Circuit, our own parish (dates?); in 2018: Synod, Circuit, our own parish (dates?))
- b. Bible studies (Genesis, selected Psalms, Galatians, etc.)
- c. Reformation memorabilia (much will be available through various Lutheran church bodies)
- d. Synod and congregational centennial memorabilia (mugs? Etc. make our own?)
- e. Book club – do some reading on these events, the people, the issues, etc., meet in homes, other venues
- f. Reformation documents: Small and Large Catechisms, the Augsburg Confession – learn more about them
- g. Why are we Lutheran?
- h. Use of radio program for highlighting events, teachings
- i. Music and its role in the Reformation (hymns: very important!)
- j. Use these times to help us develop better habits of devotion and motivation for the confession of our faith in our communities
- k. More to add _____ !!!

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Events for May

Sunday, May 1st
Center Ladies Aid meeting
after 9am service

Sunday, May 1st
Scarville Ladies Aid dinner

Bethany Lutheran College Choir
Concert at Scarville
Saturday, May 14th, 4pm

Scarville Lutheran School

Saturday, May 7th
Lutheran School Olympics
Hosted by Scarville

Thursday, May 26th
7pm Eighth Grade Graduation and
School Friends meeting

May 2016— Center & Synod Lutheran-Scarville Lutheran Parish

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1— Easter 6 <i>Sacrament of the Altar</i> 9am Center 10am Bible Study and Sun. Sch. 11am Scarville Noon - SC Ladies Aid dinner	2 <i>Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria</i>	3	4 8:30am SLS Matins 9am Catechetics 4:30pm Catechetics 7pm Ascension Eve Service @Scarville, Sacrament of the Altar	5 <i>Ascension Day</i>	6 8:45am Catechetics	7 9:30am Lutheran School Olympics – hosted at Scarville Lutheran School
8— Easter 7 9am Scarville 10am Bible Study and Sun. Sch. 11am Center	9	10	11 <i>Sts. Philip & James</i> 8:30am SLS Matins 9am Catechetics 4:30pm Catechetics 7pm Dorcas Bible study	12 7pm SLS Board meeting	13 8:45am Catechetics	14 8am workday (SC) <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 10px; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> BLC Choir at Scarville Concert at 4pm </div>
15— PENTECOST <i>Sacrament of the Altar</i> 9am Center 10am Bible Study and Sun. Sch. 11am Scarville	16	17	18 8:30am SLS Matins 9am Catechetics	19	20 8:45am Catechetics	21 7-8pm Private Absolution, Scarville sanctuary
22— TRINITY SUNDAY 9am Scarville 10am Bible Study and Sun. Sch. 11am Center	23	24	25 9am Great Plains Pastors' Conference, @BLC, Mankato, MN	26 7pm SLS 8 th Grade Graduation and School Friends mtg.	27	28
29— Trinity 1 9am Center 10:30am Scarville	30 <i>Memorial Day</i>	31				

Center Usher: Geoffrey Anderson
Center Altar & Church Cleaning: Jack & Barb Cox
Scarville Ushers: Matt Sulzle & Calvin Faugstad
Scarville Altar: Liz
Scarville Church Cleaning: n/a

SLA dinner 5/1
 setup up: Ashley & Larissa
 clean up: ALL

Scarville/Center Lutheran Parish
PO Box 105
Scarville, IA 50473

**Sunday morning Radio Program – Pastor Rank
107.3 FM KLOW 8am-8:30am
Invite your friends and neighbors to listen!**

Those wishing to donate for the support of the weekly radio program may do so by making a check out to:
Scarville Synod Lutheran Church.

Please include a note (or a memo on the check) indicating that you want the money to go toward the

radio program. The check may simply be included with the weekly offering, or sent to:

**Scarville Synod Lutheran Church
PO Box 105
Scarville, IA 50473**

Liturgical colors for May

WHITE – May 1, 8, 22

RED – May 15

GREEN – May 29

A Psalm to contemplate—Psalm 119:121-128

Your testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul keeps them.

¹³⁰ The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.

¹³¹ I opened my mouth and panted, For I longed for Your commandments.

¹³² Look upon me and be merciful to me, As Your custom is toward those who love Your name.

¹³³ Direct my steps by Your word, And let no iniquity have dominion over me.

¹³⁴ Redeem me from the oppression of man, That I may keep Your precepts.

¹³⁵ Make Your face shine upon Your servant, And teach me Your statutes.

¹³⁶ Rivers of water run down from my eyes, Because men do not keep Your law.