

*“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and 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.”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

We are nearing the end of that time in the Church Year that we refer to as the “Festival Half” of the church. This is the time of Christ, and the Sundays celebrate Christ’s life and work for our salvation. We are blessed in this time to observe the wonderful celebrations that flow from all Christ’s work for us, starting with Advent and the festival of Christmas, as we give thanks for the Christ-child, born to save us. We celebrate His Epiphany, and how He is made known as True God and True Man, who has come to be the Saviour of all the world. We observe the season of Lent, culminating in the joyous good news of Easter morning, and the resurrection of the crucified Lord. Next week we will celebrate the festival of Pentecost, giving thanks to God, who pours out His Spirit on His church, just as Jesus had promised. All of these glorious events mark a special part of Christ’s life and ministry to His church. They are times of joy and thanksgiving, assuring us that we, who were lost in our sins and condemned to eternal death in hell have now been ransomed and redeemed, as Jesus Christ has saved us and given us life in His Kingdom.

But there is one festival day that is often forgotten. Since it occurs during the week—on a Thursday rather than on Sunday, many people miss this feast and the great importance it has for the life of the church. Today we remember, with joy and thanksgiving the Ascension of our Lord. The victorious Saviour, who defeated all our enemies, has returned to His throne in heaven, to rule over all things in heaven and on earth for the sake of His people—His church. It was necessary for Him to ascend to the Father, that the Holy Spirit would be sent to deliver these gifts of Jesus to His church. What a glorious day this is for us! What a cause for celebration! As the psalmist declares: *“God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.”* (Psalm 47:5, ESV)

As Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with the disciples, He told them: *“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.”* (John 16:16, ESV) He knew that they would be saddened as He was arrested and crucified but He promised that their sorrow would turn to joy. We see that joy in the disciples in the days after the resurrection, as they spent time with the Lord they loved. Now we come with Jesus and the disciples to the hill where we are told: *“as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”* (Acts 1:9, ESV)

When Jesus spoke of this day, He told the disciples: *“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away”.* (John 16:7, ESV) I think most people feel it would be better if Jesus had never left this world. Don’t we wish that we could come to Jesus as the crowds came to Him, seeking His help, His healing hand and His comforting words? When we struggle with the cares and worries of the world today, don’t we think it would be better to have Jesus right here, visibly and physically working miracles, confronting the devil and speaking out against the false ideas and philosophies of the world in which live?

While the Lord of All may not walk among us as He did with the disciples, He is still at work in this world. He is with His people in all things. In our text today, Paul is writing from prison to the Christians in Ephesus. It is not the easiest time for Paul. It is not the easiest time for the church as a whole, but Paul speaks to these fellow saints of the great glory of the Lord, who is seated at the right hand of the Father. More importantly, Paul assures them that the glory of the ascended Lord overflows into His church, as Christ fills His church with His presence, His peace and with all that He has brought to us through His life, death and resurrection.

We may be coming to the end to the festival half of the church year, but in many ways every day should be a time to rejoice

in all that is ours through Jesus Christ. As Paul writes to encourage the church in Ephesus, he prays *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and 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.* When we know the hope that is ours in Christ and when we know the glorious inheritance that awaits us, we will want to rejoice. When we, by faith, know that wonderful power of the Lord at work for us who believe, we are filled with a joy nothing in this world can ever truly take away. The Lord who came to save us has returned to His throne of glory, having completed His saving work, but He is not apart from us. He is *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.* Yet He is also with us in all things. His glory fills the heavens, where the angels praise Him singing: *“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”* ... *“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”*” (Revelation 5:12-13, ESV) But, as Solomon said at the dedication of the temple: *“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!”* (1 Kings 8:27, ESV) The glory of the Saviour isn’t confined to heaven. It can’t be confined to heaven. His glory is an overflowing glory, as the Lord who fills all things also fills the church and its people with His glory.

Just as we often lose sight of the blessings of Christ’s ascension, so we also lose sight of His glory at work among us. We should be filled with confidence, joy, and hope. Yet we know the burdens of living with the sin of our own lives and living in this sinful world. The joy of our salvation often gives way to things like fear, discouragement, despair, and self-pity. The devil loves to use these things to lead us away from the hope that we have. He clouds our hearts so that we see only the gloom and doom, not the glory that is ours in Christ. He confuses us with the teachings of this world that lead us to doubt the truth of God’s Word and which leads us to look to ourselves for all we need day by day.

Yes, the devil is alive and well and living on the planet earth but he cannot overshadow that overflowing glory of Christ. Paul wrote our text from prison, waiting for what he expects to be his death, yet he did not lose heart. He still knew the power and might of God that are revealed in the risen and ascended Lord—the one who fills all things and who has His fullness in us, His Church. He could rejoice in the face of adversity because he himself knew the hope that he prayed would be in the Ephesians also: *the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.*

The ascended Lord is, as our text says: *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.* That means He is greater than all the devil’s dirty tricks. He no longer sets aside His glory, majesty and power as He did when He took His place with us in His humiliation, being born into our human flesh, living under the law for us and offering His holy, sinless life in our place on the cross. He again fills all things in heaven and on earth. We will declare that glorious truth in our Communion liturgy today as we sing, *Heaven and earth are full of Your glory.* How blessed we are that His glory overflows to fill His church with His presence and with all the blessings He has won for us in His life, death, resurrection and in His ascension.

Paul prays for Christ’s people in His church, that we may know the hope of our calling, that we may know the riches of the home that waits for us in heaven, and that we know God’s great power at work for believers. The glory of Christ overflows through His Word, to assure us of all He has done, is doing and will do for us. His glory flows through our Baptism, where we are brought into the family of Christ, delivered from sin, death and the devil and united with Him in His death and resurrection. And His glory flows from the table where He comes with His very body and blood to bring us forgiveness, strength and oneness with Him through the mystery of His holy Supper.

My dear people, loved by God, that glory of the Saviour who fills all things is the glory that is at work for you, too. I wish I could tell you that because Christ has ascended to His throne on high that this world has been set free from all the cares, worries and burdens we still see. No, these things continue to be both God’s judgement against sin and unbelief and His discipline to lead us to His love and grace. The devil would use these things to lead us to despair. Paul prays that we will see with the eyes of faith, so that we never lose sight of the glory of the Christ, who fills all things in heaven and on earth.

Today we celebrate, with great joy, this often-forgotten festival of the church. We celebrate and we rejoice because Christ is in control, head over all! He has been given all rule, authority, power, dominion. That is why He ascended on high. With the

eyes of our hearts so enlightened, with that revelation and spirit of wisdom, we do not lose heart. Our ascended Lord rules and fills all things for us, his Church. In that overflowing glory, we know the blessings of all that is ours in the living, triumphant, ascended Lord. Amen.