

We say one of the creeds each and every Sunday, whether that be the Apostles Creed, or the Nicene Creed, or even the Athanasian Creed on Trinity Sunday. Have you ever asked yourself: why? Why do we say the creeds? We don't say them because we have to, as if it's what we do after the readings and what we do before the middle hymn. That's not why we say the creeds. And we don't say the creeds because they're some kind of history lesson either, as if we're just going through all the things that happened so that we don't forget them. No, we say the creeds, Christians, because they mean something for us today. They teach us something about our lives. They help us to look at something in the right way, help us to hold on to what truly matters in the midst of this world. That's why we say the creeds.

But one of the things that we say in all three of those creeds is that Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven, which, of course, we're celebrating this evening. As the Apostles Creed says: "He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." And that's not in the Apostles Creed just because it happened. There's lots of things that happened in the Bible that we don't talk about in the creed. No, it's in there, Christians, because of what it means for us. The Ascension is part of our hope as Christians. The Ascension is one of the cornerstones of what it means to be a Christian. And so when we look at the Ascension of Jesus carefully, we learn something about what it means for us to live as Christians today.

Luke in our reading from Acts for this evening tells us what happened at the Ascension, but not much more than that. He's mostly interested in the facts. And so he says in Acts, chapter 1, verse 9: "And when Jesus had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." So Luke tells us, then, Jesus literally went up into the sky. He was lifted up. That's what it means. He "ascended into heaven."

But maybe we struggle with that, and wonder, "Well, what does that mean exactly? Does that mean that Jesus went through outer space? Does that mean that Jesus is still going through outer space on his way to heaven?" Or maybe somebody would scoff at that and say, "Well, that's impossible. We know better than that. We know better how the world works. So we know that this couldn't possibly happen." But honestly, Christians, that all misses the point of what Luke is trying to teach us here. Luke tells us that Jesus went up into heaven, went up into the sky literally, but he went to sit at the right hand of the Father. He went up into heaven to sit with his Father forever. As Mark tells us in the Gospel reading for this evening: "The Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." So the point of the Ascension is not how far up into the sky did Jesus go. That's not the point at all. The point of the Ascension is where Jesus is going, and that is to go up into heaven to be with his Father.

And the cloud which we hear about in Acts here proves that. Because this is not an ordinary cloud, Christians. It's not like Jesus went up into the sky and then a thundercloud rolled in and hid them so they couldn't see him anymore. This cloud is God's cloud. This cloud shows that God himself is present. As we hear in a passage like Exodus, chapter 13, where God is leading Israel through the wilderness. It says that "the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way." God is in the cloud, leading his people toward the promised land. Or again in Exodus, chapter 19, the Lord says to Moses: "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud." God descended on Mount Sinai in a cloud, and in that cloud he spoke to Moses and gave

him the Ten Commandments. And we even see this cloud in other places too, like at the Transfiguration, where Jesus, "when he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him.'" So the cloud, then, that hid Jesus from the sight of the disciples was the cloud of God. That cloud shows that he has gone into heaven. That cloud shows that he has now sat down at the right hand of God. That cloud shows that he is now sitting in victory forever. That's what Luke tells us happened on Ascension Day.

But what does that mean exactly? we might wonder. Yeah, that's what happened, but how does that affect our lives today? We need to look at other passages in the Bible to see just exactly what this means. For example, think of our Psalm that we spoke this evening, Psalm 110. Verse 1 says: "The Lord says to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'" This Psalm is talking about the Ascension, Christians. David is talking about the Ascension hundreds of years before it even happened. And he says that "the Lord," that is, the Father, "says to my Lord," that is, to Jesus Christ, his Son, "sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." What does that mean exactly? The image is of Jesus as a victorious king. He has conquered. He has won a great battle. And now, all of his enemies are lying on the ground underneath him, and he is standing on top of them. They are under his feet. It shows that he has completely defeated them. It shows that he is the dominant one, the one who is victorious forever. So that when Jesus went up into heaven, Christians, it was the beginning of his complete victory over all things. And when he returns, all things will finally be under his feet. His victory is total, and his victory will go on forever.

But you see what that means for you, Christians? All of the things that we are now suffering in this life, all of them will come to an end. All of them will be put under the feet of Christ. Those who attack us because we are Christians will be defeated in the end, because Jesus Christ ascended into heaven. All of those who make fun of us because we are Christians, or say false things about us because we are Christians, will be silenced in the end, because Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father. And those who fight against Jesus and fight against his Church will lose in the end, and they will lose forever, because Jesus has ascended into heaven to show us that he has won the victory forever. So we shouldn't be afraid of the world, Christians. What could they possibly do to us? Jesus has gone up. We shouldn't think that the evil which we hear about in the news or the evil which we see happening around us is somehow going to win in the end. Because Jesus has sat down in power at God's right hand. And Jesus rules in the midst of his enemies. His kingdom will never come to an end. The Ascension means that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us, because Jesus Christ has won the victory forever. That's what the Ascension means.

But speaking of being more than conquerors, that also points us to what Paul also says in Romans chapter 8. He says: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died, more than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." So Paul asks us: who can condemn us for our sins? Who can separate us from Jesus Christ? No one. No one in heaven, no one on earth, no one under the earth can ever take us away from Jesus Christ our Lord. And we know that, Christians, because Jesus is in heaven. He has ascended to his Father, and he now sits at his right hand.

And more than this, as he is sitting there, he is interceding for us. He's praying for us, praying to his Father on behalf of his Church. Because Jesus didn't just go up into heaven to sit there and do nothing until he comes back. Jesus is praying for each and every one of you, that your faith would not fail, that you would stand firm in the midst of every trial, that you would be brought through every single one of your troubles. And if we know that, Christians, that Jesus Christ prays for you, that God himself cares for you and what you're going through, if we know that, who could possibly be against us? Jesus himself prays to the Father for you, so why should we be afraid of anything that this world may bring? Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God, concerned for you, so why should we worry about what tomorrow may bring? The Ascension shows us that God is with us in all things, that he cares for us always.

There's one more thing to consider about what the Ascension means, and that comes from Colossians, chapter 3, where Paul says: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." So the Ascension, then, teaches us to look up. Not to stare up into the sky, wondering where Jesus went, the way that the disciples did. But rather to look up towards heaven, because that's where our Lord is. To look up there and to focus on him and to not look at the things of this world. As Paul goes on to say: "Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Jesus Christ is on the throne, Christians. So why would we be caught up in the things of this world? Jesus Christ has gone up into heaven. So why would we think the way that the world does? This world is passing away. Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father. So why would we act the way the world does? That's not who we are called to be. Because when Jesus returns, Christians, we will see him in his glory. And we will be like him. So we are looking up, because we are looking forward to that day when Jesus comes to put all things under his feet and to bring us to himself forever. The Ascension is a call for us to live as the Christians that we have been made to be, to be like Jesus who is above, so that when he returns in glory, we will greet him and enter into that same glory forever.

So Christians, the Ascension is not just something that happened a long time ago. The Ascension is not something that we just talk about because it's in the creeds. The Ascension of Jesus Christ is our great hope. The Ascension of Jesus Christ shows us that our King reigns in heaven. The Ascension shows us that Jesus Christ is King, and that we will reign with him forever. Jesus went up into heaven, so that we can face all things, so that we can face the world without fear, so that we can face the world confident, knowing that Jesus has put all things under his feet forever.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, you sit at the right hand of your Father as our glorious King forever. Teach us always to look up towards you that we may follow after you, knowing that you have made us more than conquerors, and that you will never be separated from us, and will bring us to yourself. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.