

The Ascension of Our Lord – 2023

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:15-23

Luke 24:44-53

Can you name a dozen famous explorers? Youngsters in a swimming pool use an ancient explorer's name to this day to play a game of blinded hide and seek. Marco Polo was an Italian explorer who investigated the Silk Road in Asia in the 13th Century. As an elementary student I learned about the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. In 14 hundred and 92 Columbus sailed the ocean blue. Christopher Columbus is certainly a famous explorer. Ferdinand Magellan was a Portuguese explorer who is credited with "discovering" the East Indies, lands in the Indian Ocean like present day Indonesia, Philippines, and Malaysia. Dr. Livingstone, I presume. David Livingstone was a British explorer, a Christian who wanted to abolish slavery. He lived a heroic life. He explored Africa in the late 19th century. John Glenn and Neil Armstrong were explorers. Theodore Roosevelt explored the Amazon jungle after his presidency. Leif Erikson, Ponce de Leon, and Sir Walter Raleigh (for you smokers), those are names you know. Sir Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa guide were the first to summit Mt. Everest in 1953. As a child, most of you explored the woods in your neighborhood. Yep, you're an explorer.

It's an interesting turn of phrase to say that someone "discovered" a place where others were already living. Most of those explorers were also merchants. What they wanted was commerce. Granted, there's no commerce on the moon or at the top of Mt. Everest, but commerce connects people, connects distant lands, in a positive way. Is Jesus Christ an explorer? Certainly, the Lord was a trailblazer. Leaping into our flesh, the Son of God made an exploration of our humanity. He was made like us in every way, yet without sin – that's how the book of Hebrews puts it (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15). In humility, the omnipotent Creator laid aside divine prerogatives and was born of a virgin. He explored the poverty of our human condition, our needs, our struggles, our weaknesses. Would you say that the Messianic King has explored your heart, your soul? Did Jesus explore the Father's will? Did He discover the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows, the path that the Savior took from Pontius Pilate's praetorium to the Place of the Skull, Golgotha, where He was crucified? Did the Lord of Life explore death and the grave? Was the Lord's descent into hell an exploration or more of a defiant proclamation of victory on the enemy's turf? I'd go with the latter.

Today, we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord. Forty days after Easter our Lord ascended into heaven. He took our humanity with Him. True God and true man is at the right hand of the Father. In my Father's house are many rooms. I go there to prepare a place for you (John 14:2). Jesus said that in reference to His ascension and what His ascension means for you. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus said that in reference to His ascension and what His ascension means for you. But this is my favorite: "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there my servant will be also" (John 12:26). Jesus said that in reference to His ascension and what His ascension means for you. Heaven; your citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). The Lord Christ has ensured that that is the case. You have access to heaven (Ephesians 2:19). The gates of God's eternal domain are open to you. Do you know how marvelous that is? This world is transitory. Death has no sting, not for us. Paradise is your destiny. There you will discover your place with

Daniel the Lionhearted, with Mary the Mother of God, and with Virginia Alhorn, Don Deen, Kathy Beliew and all the company of heaven. The Ascension of our Lord is our coming home festival.

Are you an explorer? What, exactly, are you exploring? The petty things of this world have had enough of your attention, don't you think? It's all passing away (1 John 2:15-17). The desires of the flesh, the vanity that fills man's eyes, the pride in possessions – it is vapid and empty and unsatisfying. You've explored it enough to know, haven't you? St. Paul wrote this: "...seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-3). What are you exploring? Are you exploring love? Are you exploring sacrifice, self-restraint, mercy? Those are the things of heaven. Love and sacrifice and mercy are of Christ. He is their origin, their font. Are you exploring the wounds of Christ in prayer? Are you exploring the heights of gratitude? Have you discovered what gratitude to God for all that you are and have brings to your soul? When you are in dire straits, do you explore Christ's promises or do you explore self-pity? When you have been wronged, do you explore the nuances of vengeance or do you discover forgiveness – your own and then someone else's?

When Jesus said: "Follow me" what did He mean? Follow me. Is it a prompt for the hearer to devote themselves to Christ's teaching? Yes; it certainly is that. Follow me. Does it mean that we are to follow the Son of God into His death? Does "follow me" mean that we are to die with Christ? Yes; it certainly does. Remember, He's a trailblazer. Is He calling us to do as He does? Well, Jesus did say this: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). Follow me. Does it mean that Jesus is determined to raise us from the dead and bring us to heaven? Is "follow me" a declaration of His intent as much as it is a prompt for us to abandon sin and cling to what is holy? Absolutely; "follow me" very much includes what Jesus has done and is doing in your life. Are you a "follower" of the Lord Christ? The collect for the day says this: "Almighty God, as your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him." Is that prayer in keeping with following Christ?

Jesus said: "where I am there my servant will be also." Does following Christ mean that you come here, to this Divine Service? Yeah; it sure does. This is where the commerce of heaven takes place. This is where the One who has gone into the heavens, the one who is seated in power at the right hand of the Father, this is where the Lord of heaven and earth serves those who follow Him. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (John 18:20). The commerce of heaven takes place in this Divine Service. Here you receive the banquet of forgiveness, a foretaste of the heavenly feast to come. Here you receive the salvation purchased for you by Jesus' death on the Holy Cross. Here the barrier between heaven and earth is surmounted as the ascended Christ brings His kingdom to us and we participate in our future. "Where I am, there my servant will be also." If you are holding onto this world, you are holding onto the wrong thing. If you are behaving like this world is your home then you are behaving the wrong way. If you are setting your mind on things above then joy will come into your life. Confidence, hope, love, mercy – these virtues are born in us as we explore the things that are above.

The church is always exploring. The more of Christ we have the more of Him we desire. The crucified and risen King is among us. His love is endless. The contours of His life are a treasure to be perpetually discovered and rediscovered. He opens our minds by His Word. He calls us by name and we follow Him. We are going to go on exploring the Kingdom of God. These psalm verses describe Christ the King Lutheran Church and our spirit of exploration: “Walk about Zion, go around her; number her towers, consider well her ramparts, go through her citadels, that you may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever” (Psalm 48:12-14).