

The Ascension of Our Lord – 2025

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:15-23

Luke 24:44-53

I was in the drive through at Burger King and the person behind me began to honk. They had a reason. I had been sitting there for five minutes because I was conflicted. I wasn't conflicted over the flame broiled burger – that was a cinch. I was conflicted over the milkshake. Not a soda, not lemonade, not iced tea – I was going to have a milkshake. I could taste the two choices I couldn't make up my mind. I wasn't about to get two. Strawberry or vanilla; I was conflicted; the conflict perturbed the person behind me – I get it. Have you ever been conflicted? Alise and I were thinking of the Florida Keys. And then we were thinking of the Hawaiian Islands. The price was the same. Both are choice destinations. We were conflicted. The date was chosen. October 1st – we're going *somewhere*. Do you think that it would help our decision-making process if we knew that a hurricane will blow through the Keys on October 1st? Would we be conflicted in regard to our destination if we knew that a hurricane would destroy our vacation if we went to the Keys?

I suppose that you're familiar with being conflicted. Perhaps you've had buyer's remorse as well. After being conflicted and choosing one you later lamented not choosing the other. Have you been there? Jesus said that we can't serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). Some folks are conflicted. The flesh or the spirit, follow Christ or follow the world, lay up for yourself treasure in heaven or treasure on earth; sometimes we don't choose well. St. Paul was conflicted. Life or death; he wanted the courage so that whatever happened the Lord Christ would be exalted – whether Paul lived or died. Paul wrote this to the church at Philippi: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Paul knew that remaining in the world would present opportunities to proclaim the Gospel, opportunities to bring light into people's lives by way of God's Word. But Paul was conflicted. "I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account" (Philippians 1:23-24). Paul knew that God was in charge timing-wise. That trust resolved the conflict.

During the distribution of the sacrament today, the congregation is going to sing a song that is dear to many of us: Jerusalem, My Happy Home. There isn't a *hint* of conflict in the words of this hymn. Do you believe that that happy confidence is real? Do you believe that Christians genuinely pine for heaven? "Jerusalem, my happy home, When shall I come to thee? When shall my sorrows have an end? Thy joys when shall I see?" It's not only those who suffer who long for heaven. The Bible tells us that we are strangers here (1 Peter 2:11). The Bible tells us that we are strangers on earth, pilgrims, sojourners (Hebrews 11:13-16). After they sinned, Adam and Eve were pitched out of paradise. Paradise was their home. This broken creation is no one's home. But seraphim, angels with flaming swords, guarded the way back to Paradise. Ever since, we have been living east of Eden. Until Christ ascended. Until the crucified and risen Son of God ascended into heaven. Until the crucified and risen Son of God ascended *with our humanity* and was seated at the right hand of God.

None of us have ever been there, but we're going. "Well, I've never been to heaven. But I've been to Oklahoma." I take my American citizenship pretty seriously. I suspect that you're the same. The bible says that our citizenship is in heaven. Do you take that seriously? We've been born again, born from above, born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5). All of us who have been baptized are a new creation – the old has gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). A new creation; when our Lord returns, He will create a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1-3). That's where your citizenship is. You don't belong on this broken earth, at least not in any lasting sense, not in any permanent sense. You are a new creation. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). That is one thing that I'm not conflicted about. Christ died for me. For you, the Lord of heaven and earth spilled His royal blood and inaugurated His eternal kingdom.

The Eternal Son of God left heaven and took up the form of a servant, the form of a sacrifice, the form of a man. He was not conflicted. In love, He ventured here to lay claim to us. His treasure was you. He wanted to lay up treasure in heaven. He redeemed you, prepared a place for you, died and rose for you. You have felt the tug in your heart toward Him. He instilled that in you. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you distance yourself from what is vain and empty and profane. You being tugged toward Him, toward your Savior, is a tug toward heaven. The Holy Spirit is your sherpa and He is leading you to heaven. The risen Christ told His disciples: Stay in Jerusalem. Wait for the promise of the Father. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you (Acts 1:4,8). A charging bull is powerful. Is that the kind of power that Jesus describes? Splitting the atom unleashes power. Is that the power that fills Christ's church? What is the power that saves you from sin and death? Is it found in a Visa card? Is it found under the hood of an F-150? Do you think that Christ's blood has power? What about the water of Holy Baptism, the bread and wine of Holy Communion, the simple words of Holy Scripture – do those things have power? Are you conflicted about saying so? Are you conflicted about telling someone, anyone, that the empty tomb of Christ Jesus is the power of salvation, a power no mere human agent could conjure up?

A hurricane is going to blow upon all those who are without Christ on the Last Day. It will be a hellish wind, an inescapable wind of judgment, an imprisoning and devastating wind. We cannot serve two masters. In a certain sense, to be in this flesh is to be conflicted, but heaven breaks in here. Our future shatters the boundaries of space and time and we participate in the kingdom that has been prepared for us. We store up treasures in heaven. We fix our eyes on Jesus. We follow Him. The Scriptures take this for granted. God's Word emphasizes that we are more than just creatures locked into a temporal, fleshly existence. Listen to this for this describes you: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind 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 1:1-3). In baptism you died and you were raised with Christ. You are a citizen of heaven. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. You are a new creation.

It doesn't always feel like it. Boy Howdy, it doesn't always feel like it! Sometimes we feel like we're the furthest thing from a citizen of heaven. Because of sin or someone who has treated us like trash or because of a relentlessly condemning conscience or because we failed in our responsibilities – we often feel scummy or aimless or weak or defeated or just plain stupid. As

our Lord was ascending into heaven, He told His disciples that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations (Luke 24:47). You are a fulfillment of that promise. You come here to hear the Word of God. You come here to participate in a life that has triumphed over sin and death, a life that elevates your own, irrespective of your failures, your feelings, or your barking conscience. We come to the Divine Service on Sundays and the risen Savior raises *us* from our petty, earthbound preoccupations. This is the day that the Lord has made! This is the day of the resurrection! We are in Christ. There's a mystical union between the Lord Jesus and His believers. A real, consequential, living and enduring union exists between us and the Savior who is true God and true man in one person. That union is described in this verse from Ephesians: "...[God] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). That's not opinion. That is not conjecture. That is not wishful thinking. That is divine truth and it is a sweet, sweet reality for us who are making our way home. May God bless us on our way, as we truly follow our crucified, risen and ascended Lord.