

Sermon for Ascension Day

Sermon Text: Ephesians 1:20b-23



^{20b} ...when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ 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. ²² And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Five beggars sit around a campfire. Like always, they had stashed their few belongings under a bridge and now tried to ignite a fire that would protect them from the cold of the night. A couple of newspapers and scraps of wood should keep the fire going at night. While ripping the newspaper, a section from the newspaper caught Franz' eye which said: "Christ's Ascension" and next to it was a picture of Christ being lifted heavenward into a white cloud with outstretched arms: "Tell me, Peter! Do you also actually believe that Jesus flew into the sky on a white cloud like a rocket? And if so, I would be interested in where this cloud can now be found?", Franz wanted to know from his friend Peter. Everyone knew that Peter was a Christian and that's why they all looked to him. Not because they were interested in where Christ is now. But because they thought that there could be something that they could laugh about. Peter was currently fanning the flames with his breath. Then he glanced up and watched contentedly as the first flames ignited. Then he looked around and asked a counter question: "What is more important? The fire or the warmth that comes from the fire?" "It's obvious," said Franz: "we need the warmth. But there is no warmth without the fire! So we need the fire to warm ourselves with." "Right," said Peter. "And it's the same with Christ in Whom I believe. He gives me warmth. But He can only give me this warmth because He is the source of the warmth. I can't say where He is but I know that He gives me warmth. And I don't need to know more, right?" Peter explained further: "I don't know where Jesus is now, but I know that I can warm myself in His fire. Even when I'm not feeling well and I can't even see the fire." Then Peter explained how Christians around the world solemnly profess every Sunday: "I believe in Christ, who sits at the right hand of God." He also explained of many people who, even in death, could see this Jesus and were comforted by Him. "Whoever dies like this, dies well!" Peter finally says. "And whoever lives like this, also lives well!" added Franz.

Dear congregation. This small story that I made up myself, should be a short introduction to the topic of Ascension. On Christ's Ascension Day, we always come across these two sides: On the one side are the disciples of Jesus looking astonishedly into the heavens; on the other side is Christ, who is lifted up before their eyes to the right hand of God. On the one side is a Church that is persecuted and oppressed for centuries; on the other side is Christ who is ruler over the whole world. On the one side are the remains of a person who died of Covid who is cremated in smoke squadrons in India; on the other side is the loving Hand of our God who receives the dead into His kingdom. On the one side, God who is far away or above us; on the other side is God who is among us and near to us. Also on the one side are a

couple of beggars who warm themselves around a fire; and on the other side is the God of the universe who knows them all and doesn't let one hair from their heads fall without His express permission. This picture of the beggars around the campfire is also a picture of us as the Church.

Now how, dear congregation, should we know that Christ sits at the right hand of God? And how should we know that He possesses all power? Above all, how can we know that Jesus wants to warm us with His love? Where do we even get the right to talk about our Christ in such a way that He can be there for every single person in the world? There are other powers at work in our world. These powers are a lot more impressive and, by human understanding, a lot stronger than Christ, whom we can neither prove nor even see. And then there are still so many things that determine us and our lives. The media leads us to believe how we must live and the advertising industry creates wants and desires that seem much more convincing than our Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father and is in heaven. Who should assure us human beings that Jesus is Lord? Our sermon text for today gives us the answer to this question. "God placed Christ as the head of the Church, which is His body."

The text shows us that we are intricately connected with Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father - we here, the congregation in the next town, the large congregations in the cities and also the small ones. There, where only two or three are gathered around a campfire.... We are the body of Christ. The fact that Christ is present in His body, the Church, is just as real as we believe that He is there in communion. That's exactly why the world can experience that Christ is near. We are filled with His Spirit and represent the perfection of Christ even when we human beings are anything but perfect. We sense His warmth even then when we can't see the fire. What a great Word that bursts forth and strengthens us and makes us completely certain. When we pray, it is never just as those who are gathered here, rather we pray and celebrate together with the body of Christ throughout the world and even in Heaven. And when we go out into the vast world to tell others about Jesus, we never have the right to talk as if it's about our business. No, Christ Himself steps into the middle and testifies to people who He is and what He can do.

Ascension is the feast day between Easter and Pentecost. 40 days ago, Jesus was raised from the dead. And after 10 days, the Holy Spirit will come down. Today, 10 days before Pentecost, on Ascension Day, we receive a glimpse into the opened heaven where Jesus sits at the right hand of God. We gaze up where Jesus is. Jesus is with God. But at the same time, we also look left and right. There we see many other Christians who are warmed by Jesus' love. Ascension Day shows us the direction. Our power doesn't come from ourselves but from Jesus. But our power doesn't stay with us. It goes further to our neighbor. The warmth and love of Jesus is like a fire that goes throughout the whole world. And at the end, this love leads us home. We all long for and hope for the day when we will be united with Jesus and will see Him face to face. We look forward to the day when He will fulfill all things. Amen.