

4 May 2016
Eve of the Ascension of our Lord

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Not Left Behind”

Text: 2 Kings 2:5-15; Acts 1:1-11; Luke 24:44-53

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is Ascended! [*He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia.

It's no fun being left behind. If everyone goes on vacation, but you have to stay home and feed the dog. If everyone goes to a movie, but you have to stay home and finish homework. If there's a holiday and everyone gets the day off, but you have to work.

The kind of what Ascension Day feels like, isn't it? Jesus ascends into heaven and the disciples get left behind. Jesus ascends into heaven, and we're still here in a world filled with struggles and work, sin and death. Good for Jesus, no fun for us.

That's how Elisha felt. His master, his teacher, the great Elijah was taken away from him, and he was left behind. He saw the fiery chariots and horsemen of Israel, and then a whirlwind taking Elijah up to heaven - and then in the blink of an eye it was all gone. It was still and quiet and all that was left was the cloak Elijah had been wearing. He picks it up and slaps it against the water of the Jordan, and with great sadness and mourning wails: ***Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?*** He had never felt so empty and alone.

But then something happened . . . the water Elisha had slapped, parted. Just as it had for Elijah, so now also for Elisha. He wasn't alone after all. And it wasn't just a double portion of Elijah's spirit that was with him - the Lord was with him. The Lord who divided the waters of the Red Sea, and had divided the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel to cross into the Promised Land, and who had divided the Jordan for Elijah just a moment ago, was also now with him. He wasn't alone. He wasn't forgotten. He wasn't left behind.

That must have been one of the stories Jesus taught the disciples when ***He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures***; when He showed them ***everything in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms that was written about Him***. That He was going to ascend, like Elijah. But like Elisha, they would not be left alone; they would not be left behind. He, the Lord, was still going to be with them. *He would be with them always* (Matt 28:20). They would receive ***the promise of the Father***. They would be ***clothed not*** with a cloak that Jesus left behind, but ***with power from on high***. They would receive the Holy

Spirit.

The disciples must have been taught that by Jesus because when Jesus ascended, they were not sad, as we might expect. Instead, Luke tells us, they were *overjoyed*. ***They worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the Temple blessing God.*** And as we will hear in ten days from now, they did receive the Holy Spirit, poured out in full, on the Day of Pentecost.

So while Jesus ascended into heaven, we are not left behind, alone in this world filled with struggles and work, sin and death. That's what satan wants us to believe - and sometimes we buy into it. We feel forgotten, forsaken, neglected, alone, left behind, like our Lord is a million miles away and doesn't see our trouble, our need . . . or doesn't care.

But it isn't so. Yes, Jesus is enthroned in His ascension. Yes, He has returned to the right hand of the Father. **But He hasn't left us behind - He has taken us with Him** (Eph 2:6).

You see, when the Son of God came down from heaven and was made man and named Jesus, He took our humanity into Himself. He united Himself to us in an everlasting bond. He didn't just use His body for a while and then shed it like snake shedding it's skin when He was done with it. No! He is always and forever God and man together - in His birth, in His life, in His crucifixion, in His burial and resurrection, and now in His ascension. He took you and your sin into Himself, and put Himself and His life into you. He couldn't leave you behind if He wanted . . . and He doesn't want to. He wants you with Him in His kingdom. And so He ascends to make it so. That where He is, you may be also. **One small step for Him, but one giant leap for mankind.**

But until that day of our own resurrection and ascension, when Jesus ***returns in the same way [the disciples] saw Him go into heaven***, the Lord is also with us here, for the Spirit is with us. The Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son (Nicene Creed), and who leads us back and connects us to the Father and the Son. The Spirit poured into you when you were baptized and crossed through *those* waters. The Spirit who gives you the forgiveness of Jesus through the Word of the Gospel. You may feel left behind and alone, but as Elisha realized, it is not so. Don't trust your feelings. Repent, and believe the Word.

It's not easy. Elisha had a rough go of it, and the apostles had their share of suffering and martyrdom. But we are also told, they rejoiced at being counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41). They rejoiced even in suffering. For if Jesus is ascended and enthroned, and you are joined to Him, and you have the Spirit as a guarantee of your own resurrection and ascension, what can this world and the prince of this world do to you? Your life, your future, is safe with Jesus on the throne.

So Ascension Day really is a day to rejoice as we receive a glimpse of our future, when *Up Through Endless Ranks of Angels* (LSB #491) is where we will go as well. *The endless ranks of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven* who join us here around this altar everytime we receive the Body and Blood of the Lord. For where He is, they are. And He is here for us, to feed us and strengthen us, to forgive us and keep us. The Lord who has taken you into Himself puts Himself into you. So you are not alone. Never alone. Never left behind.

So struggle on, like Elisha. And rejoice, like the disciples. And if you're looking for the Lord, do not gaze into heaven, but come to the altar, for here is your Lord for you. Here, until the day when He comes again in glory, and will no longer be hidden behind the clouds of bread and wine, water, and words, but we will see Him as He is. And then it is we who will stay in the city - the city of God, the new Jerusalem - forever.

For Christ is *ascended!* [*He is ascended indeed! Alleluia!*] And so are we.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.