

Easter 5 - May 24, 2020

Pre-service Music "Children of the Heavenly Father" LSB 725

Opening Address

Hymn "On Christ's Ascension I Now Build" LSB 492

1 On Christ's ascension I now build
 The hope of my ascension;
This hope alone has always stilled
 All doubt and apprehension;
For where the Head is, there as well
I know His members are to dwell
 When Christ will come and call them.

2 Since Christ returned to claim His throne,
 Great gifts for me obtaining,
My heart will rest in Him alone,
 No other rest remaining;
For where my treasure went before,
There all my thoughts will ever soar
 To still their deepest yearning.

3 O grant, dear Lord, this grace to me,
 Recalling Your ascension,
That I may serve You faithfully
 In thanks for my redemption;
And then, when all my days will cease,
Let me depart in joy and peace
 In answer to my pleading.

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The Invocation: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Confession: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us then confess our sins to God our Father. Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

The Absolution: In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake, God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ, He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer of the Day: Let us pray...through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Old Testament Reading is written in the book of Second Kings, chapter 2, verses 1 to 15.

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ² And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³ And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." ⁴ Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵ The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take away your master from over you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." ⁶ Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. ⁷ Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸ Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground. ⁹ When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." ¹⁰ And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." ¹¹ And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. ¹² And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. ¹³ And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴ Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over. ¹⁵ Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

The Acts Reading is from chapter 1, verses 1 to 11.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ And while staying^[a] with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

The Holy Gospel is according to St. Luke, chapter 24, verses 44 to 53.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, ⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God

Apostles' Creed: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

Hymn "A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing" LSB 493

1 A hymn of glory let us sing!

New hymns throughout the world shall ring:

Alleluia, alleluia!

Christ, by a road before untrod,

Ascends unto the throne of God.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

2 The holy apostolic band

Upon the Mount of Olives stand.

Alleluia, alleluia!

And with His faithful foll'wers see

Their Lord ascend in majesty.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

3 To them the shining angels cry,

"Why stand and gaze upon the sky?"

Alleluia, alleluia!

"This is the Savior," thus they say;

"This is His glorious triumph day!"

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

4 "You see Him now, ascending high

Up to the portals of the sky."

Alleluia, alleluia!

"Hereafter Jesus you shall see

Returning in great majesty."

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

5 Be now our joy on earth, O Lord,

And be our future great reward.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Then, throned with You forever, we

Shall praise Your name eternally.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

6 O risen Christ, ascended Lord,
All praise to You let earth accord:

Alleluia, alleluia!

You are, while endless ages run,
With Father and with Spirit one.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

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The Sermon: History Repeats Itself

“History repeats itself.” This is a common quote that we all know and have seen come into contact with in our lives. Less common, though, is the knowledge of who said this quote. No one knows for sure, but it is thought to come from the famous and respected leader, Winston Churchill. If anyone knew the validity of this truth, it would have to be a guy like Churchill. In his life, he saw the repetition of the world’s two deadliest conflicts, World Wars I and II, fought by the same countries, no less! He saw the rise and fall of empires, whether it be the German Empire or French Republic. He saw economic recessions, depressions, and booms. Churchill saw atrocities like genocide, whether it be against the Armenians in World War I, or the Jews in World War II. Safe to say, history repeats itself.

We can even see this in our lives, too. It can be the playoff woes of our favorite sports teams (Minnesotans know that with the Vikings, don’t they?), the predictable actions of a mother or son, the daily routines we have in our lives, or how the days seem to blend together in our shelter in place. History repeats itself.

We also see this in Scripture. In fact, in the Bible, history repeating itself is a common thing! In the book of Judges, we see this pattern six times! What is it? Israel serves the Lord but then falls into sin and idolatry. They become enslaved and then cry out to God. He answers their pleas and raises up a judge who saves them, and the cycle repeats itself.

In the book of Kings, we continually see the repetition of the phrases “and he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” or “and he did what was right in the sight of the LORD.”

Broadly speaking, in the Old Testament, we see the pattern of God sending prophets to his wayward people, and Him showing mercy when they don’t deserve it! History repeats itself, here, too. Today, we will see another example of this as we celebrate the Ascension. We see with Elijah being taken up into Heaven numerous instances of history repeating itself.

Our text begins with what is the prophet Elijah’s final journey. The man was a fearless reformer, rebuke of kings, battler of false prophets, and a mighty man of prayer. With his word, he could cause droughts and rain, multiply flour and oil, call down fire on his enemies, and raised a widow’s son. The man had a wonderful career and ministry which was coming to an end. He was work was almost finished.

His last task was to visit the companies of prophets in Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. The “sons of prophets” were schools of music and theology in ancient Israel, conducted by God’s prophets to provide a regular supply of messengers through whom God would speak to His people. It was an ancient world Seminary, so to say.

Elijah and Elisha, his protégé, are leaving the school at Gilgal. “**The LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind**”. However, Elijah doesn’t know who knows this. He doesn’t want anyone present for this event without being assured it is in accordance with the will of God. So he tells Elisha, “**Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.**” He wants to discourage his partner from going with. But Elisha responds with an oath, “**As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.**” Elisha seems to sense what is going to happen. He essentially says, “You can’t get rid of me that easy, old friend!” So, the two men make the seven mile trek to Bethel.

When they arrive, the sons of the prophets, the sem students, come out to Elisha and tell him, “**Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?**” They seem to know, too. God revealed it to them as well. Elijah’s being taken up to heaven was to strengthen the faith of Elisha and the

prophets, and all believers in Israel. Elisha's response then confirms our suspicions. He says, **"Yes, I know it; keep quiet."** You can sense the apprehension in his voice.

Now, history repeats itself. Essentially, the same conversation and response takes place. Elijah tries to ditch his protégé by saying, **"Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho."** But Elisha doubles down and says, **"As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."** It works, and they continue their walk to Jericho. This distance is about 12 miles.

Like before, the prophets at Jericho come out and tell Elisha what the prophets at Bethel told him. **"Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?"** It has been revealed to them as well. With this event and revelation, God is going to strengthen and fortify the faith of the prophets in their consecration of their lives to Him. And, like before, Elisha responds, **"Yes, I know it; keep quiet."**

And now, getting "Peteresque," as I call it, the exchange happens a third time. Elijah pleads with Elisha to remain behind as he goes to the Jordan, but Elisha responds, **"No, As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."** Again, his loyalty persuades the old man. They continue on together. This time, though, 50 prophets, 50 students, stood at a distance to not miss this event as the two men approached the Jordan. As the water of the Jordan nipped at the toes of Elijah, he takes off his cloak, the outward sign of his office, and makes it into a staff, and strikes the water. His staff made cloak became the vehicle of the Spirit's power, the same Spirit who works unseen and had inspired the prophet for all those years.

As the cloak made staff strikes the waters of the Jordan, it parts, just like it did 500 years prior when the Israelites crossed it as they entered their new home. It also echoes back to Israel's crossing of the Red Sea. As the two prophets cross the now parted Jordan River, Elijah tells his spiritual son to make a request: **"Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you."** Elisha responds, **"Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me."** He reflects Deuteronomy in his request, which taught that the firstborn son or favorite of the father would receive twice the inheritance of others. Elijah had begotten Elisha through the Word. Elisha, like Solomon asking for wisdom, asks for a practical gift in serving God's people.

Elijah tells the young man, "Maybe. **You have asked a hard thing.**" Elijah realizes the difficulty of Elisha's request. God gives and sends the Spirit, not Elijah. He doesn't have the power to grant the request. He polite fully says, **"yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so."** The old prophet wisely places the initiative in God's hands. They continue their walking and talking.

As they do, **"behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."** Just as God had formerly taken Enoch away that he might not taste death, Elijah didn't either, being suddenly taken and carried to Heaven without dying. Elisha's response? In grief and pain, he cries out, **"My father, my father! The real strength of Israel!"** As he stands there, Elisha notices something remained, Elijah's cloak! Taking the old cloak of his master, he rolls it into a staff, and strikes the Jordan like Elijah. Miraculously, it parted for him, too, and he crosses over on dry ground. Proof that Elisha's request had been granted. The prophets realized this, too. They cry, **"The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha."** Elijah's work was finished, and he was taken up. God's Spirit is left, equipping Elisha and encouraging the prophets for the work at hand.

But, remember, history repeats itself. As one of the ancient world's best historians, Luke knows that. In our readings, he takes us to a familiar scene and setting. In our readings, he presents a former master whose work was done. He was a religious reformer, too. He spoke powerful words to the authorities, and was a man of prayer as well. He could do miracles as well. He walked on water, and by His word, multiplied bread and fish, and raised a widow's son from the dead. Like Elijah, His work was done, too. He finished his mission of saving God's people by His death in their place and His rising again to show His death had been accepted. Jesus takes one final journey with His disciples to Bethany, specifically, the Mount of Olives. There, He tells them, **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** As He says these things, He is lifted up and taken out of their sight. His work is done. God's people are saved, and He is enthroned over all, ruling for the benefit and sake of His Church and people. The disciples stand their awestruck, and are dismissed by the angels. Similar to Elijah and Elisha, right? But, what about the Spirit?

Ten days later, at Pentecost, the Spirit is poured out, transforming their lives, and empowering them for the work at hand. Acts 4:13 describes it well: “**Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.**” Jesus’ work was finished, and He was taken up. God’s Spirit was poured out, equipping and encouraging His disciples for the task at hand.

But, again, remember, history does repeat itself. In the waters of baptism, God applies His Son’s finished work to you. His perfect obedience and perfect life, lived for you and given to you. You stand before the Father as no longer guilty and condemned but declared to be his beloved son or daughter, His beloved servant. The declaration is confirmed with the giving of His Spirit through those waters. The same spirit that was doubled on Elisha, poured out on the prophets, and as Paul says, “raised Christ from the dead,” dwells in you. As a result, we are daily renewed and transformed. We are equipped for service in our lives as fathers, mothers, son, daughter, nephew, niece, neighbor, friend, and employee. Our witness is empowered, and our words are made effective. We are encouraged by our Lord’s ascension over all things for your benefit, and for mine. So, God’s finished work is applied, His Spirit poured out, and His people equipped and encouraged. History repeats itself.

Prayer of the Church

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of the trumpet. Ascended Lord, hear the prayers of Your people and grant our supplication.

Brief silence

That the Lord may grant us all things in Christ so we may be sustained in trial, strengthened in weakness and delivered from trouble, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Church of Christ may flourish and the good news of Christ crucified, risen and ascended would be proclaimed to all the ends of the earth, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord may richly supply us with faithful pastors who will preach Your Word in season and out; and that we may hear, believe and live out this Gospel, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the nations of the earth may seek peace; and that the leaders of our country may pursue justice, righteousness and peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the pandemic may come to an end, and that livelihood and common life may resume, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That all who are afflicted may be strengthened in illness and comforted in adversity, [*especially* _____], let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the faithful may not fret what we do not know but rejoice in Christ, our Savior, and live in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord may grant us joyful hearts and peace at the last, knowing that neither death nor life, nor any powers, can separate us from the love of God in Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That we may be as generous in our tithes and offerings as the Lord is in giving us His gifts, and that we may support the poor and those in need, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That we may know the Lord’s presence in the means of His grace, hearing His Word, receiving His absolution and feasting at His table with faith and joy in our hearts, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That we may remember the saints of old, who contended for the Lord in their own day; and that we may join them at last in the marriage feast of the Lamb without end, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

All these things and whatever else we need, we ask You to grant us for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

The Lord’s Prayer: Let us pray the prayer Jesus has taught us to pray: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Benediction: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look on You with His favor and give you peace. Amen.

Final Hymn "Spread the Reign of God the Lord" LSB 830

1 A hymn of glory let us sing!

New hymns throughout the world shall ring:

Alleluia, alleluia!

Christ, by a road before untrod,
Ascends unto the throne of God.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

2 The holy apostolic band
Upon the Mount of Olives stand.

Alleluia, alleluia!

And with His faithful foll'wers see
Their Lord ascend in majesty.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

3 To them the shining angels cry,
"Why stand and gaze upon the sky?"

Alleluia, alleluia!

"This is the Savior," thus they say;
"This is His glorious triumph day!"

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

4 "You see Him now, ascending high
Up to the portals of the sky."

Alleluia, alleluia!

"Hereafter Jesus you shall see
Returning in great majesty."

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

5 Be now our joy on earth, O Lord,
And be our future great reward.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Then, throned with You forever, we
Shall praise Your name eternally.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

6 O risen Christ, ascended Lord,
All praise to You let earth accord:

Alleluia, alleluia!

You are, while endless ages run,
With Father and with Spirit one.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

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Closing Address and Announcements

Postlude "Come People of the Risen King" Getty