**Ephesians 1:15-23**

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, **16** I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, **17** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, **18**  having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, **19** and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might **20** that he worked in Christ 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.

**“Hope Ascended On High”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. If God used forty days of terror to judge a sinful world in the time of Noah, then the forty days after the judgment of God’s Son on the cross was a time of great joy. It was influential for shaping those first disciples to have a firm foundation in the Gospel. St. Luke tells us Jesus, “…presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:3). Christ risen from the dead always came with His Word. This was inseparable so that after the ascension Jesus was not removing comfort. Rather, His power was reaching out with all hopefulness finally to be in Him.

Certainly, a momentum of good news came from the ascension. The first disciples, “returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.” Then again, times change and after 30 years hope was hard pressed. The second generation of Christians did not have the glories seen as by the first. Their experiences looked quite different especially in Ephesus. Riots and persecutions were common against these baptized. Likewise, when Paul wrote to the Ephesians he was not in a position of power, but sitting in prison at Rome. Nevertheless, this apostle had a better answer to give. He told them, “I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers…” Our Lord Jesus ascended to reign with all power from on high to hope in Him.

If knowledge is power, then we might discover problems with what we know. Some frankly do not know enough, others know things that are just plain not good or false, and still others know what is right, but end up using it the wrong way. St. Paul was a Pharisee, educated, and set apart from others. The help for the Ephesians would not come from such strength achieved by a man. Instead, Paul made an appeal to a greater authority in his prayer saying, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened…” Just as God gave in baptism, so He would give what they needed. This was wisdom set upon how God worked all good out the cross of His Son. This was revelation from God by His Word that gave more than knowledge but faith in Him.

Plenty hold up the sales pitch for progress, but God knows what lies deep in every age that none sees nor wants to confess. It is not progress to glory, but a problem of sin and death. “The heart, in Biblical language, is the center, not only of feeling, but also of thinking, willing, and understanding” (Kretzmann 265). You cannot fix the broken hearts of sinners, regardless of how many laws we make or self-improvement books to read. St. Paul told the Corinthians, “…the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”(2 Corinthians 4:4). Only Jesus opens the mind of His disciples to understand the Scriptures. He gives wisdom and revelation fixed on His sacrifice for a sinful world. Frustration over power or failure to live up to the Law finally means knowing the absolute care God gives by the Gospel.

Christ ascending rules with all power built on a promise. That is what Ascension day is all about. Jesus has risen into heaven to be crowned as King of kings. You might say, “How does that at make a difference for my life? What is the big deal, He is God?” The Ephesians Christians probably wondered the same thing concerning their situation. It all comes down to the baptized in every age still seeking to control life at the present when the victory God gives to you is a promise. Jesus declared, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses…” This confidence looks to Christ who knows our sorrows over sin for He suffered them on the cross. He felt the powers of men and the Devil take hold of His life. However, now He rules in heavenly glory for our good.

Rather than some plan, St. Paul prayed. The Ephesians Christians had a better promise worked for them by Christ. He said, “…that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe…” This is to notice that God calls us into His kingdom by the Word. It is to see riches for you His saints more glorious than what any holds in their hands on earth. It is to recognize power greater than the Law and works, but the gift of eternal life God gives in the Gospel for all who believe. True power has become finally a promise. This is what Jesus speaks by His Word. “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:20). There is no alternative for justifying faith knows nothing else than Jesus. He gets the work done. He saves sinners. He protects from false teachings. He remains throughout the ages. He rules now and forever.

Pity the world for Christ fills us with a bright future. This becomes clouded at times because sin still seeks to drag us down. It twists hearts away from the Word to deny God and not love our neighbor as ourselves. A similar danger was among the Ephesians in the midst of their darkness and with Paul in prison. What was their faith and love if it had no hope? This was not hope in the strength of men or what any could hope for in this life. It was what came from the eternal power worked by God. Jesus rose from the dead and ascended with all glory and power as hope for His baptized. The Father in heaven “…put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” As God, Jesus rules over all things, but He chose His body to be the Church. His presence fills it with all hopefulness in Him.

Many have lost hope in the church. They see it only as an institution run by men. Yet, the true Church remains the body of Christ for all eternity. Our Lutheran Fathers knew there was still hope left for them in their distressing time. They wrote, “This Church alone is called Christ’s body, which Christ renews, sanctifies, and governs by His Spirit” (Tappert 169:5). Christ brings all hopefulness in Him marked by the pure teaching of the Gospel and proper administration of His sacraments. He paid the price calling all sinners to repentant over His death. He rose to restore new life to be in His Name. He ascended to prepare a place for His saints of unfading glory. Our Lord has plans for you and this congregation. He reaches out with promises that will never perish. The future shines with the fullness of God for us. Our Lord Jesus ascended to reign with all power from on high to hope in Him. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.