

You will receive Power and Authority
John 16:1-11, Acts 1:1-11

Friends, on Tuesday November 4th 2008, millions of people across this world watched as the American people elected Barak Obama as their president.

This was an historic election for many reasons. Obama was the first African American president, He received the most votes for a presidential candidate in American history.

He won the popular and electoral vote by the largest margin in 12 years, as well as the largest percentage of the popular vote for a Democrat in nearly a half-century.

All this occurred friends, because from what I remember at the time, Obama represented the hope, the possibility for many Americans that things could be different, that things could get better, that Americans could pull together and resurrect the American dream – “Yes we can!”

And when the final count was tallied on Nov 4th 2008 and it became evident that Barak Obama had been elected President of the United States, his supporters and followers erupted into joyful celebration.

But friends – in the election of any government or president, we often forget that the election is simply the means the by which selection is made and that it is actually the installation – the inauguration where the President takes the oath of office, which ushers that person into the authority and power of their position, and starts their term in government.

You may have been victorious in the election, but the authority of the office still needs to be conferred upon you.

In the same way friends – as we have just finished celebrating Easter and Jesus’ victory over the grave it is easy to forget that without his Ascension into heaven - the work for which he gave his life would have remained incomplete... and the era of spreading that new life, which He had been resurrected into, would not have begun.

Yes, the events of Christmas and Easter are very important points in the over-all plan of God – but there are other very important and significant events as well – such as Christ’s Ascension and Pentecost.

Unfortunately we don’t celebrate these events with the same intensity as Christmas and Easter, and it’s to our own loss really.

We miss out on a fuller understanding and experience of who Jesus Christ is and what that can mean in our lives...

And friends I have to say that celebrating only Christmas and Easter as the exclusive high points in our faith is actually a form of pagan Christianity...

What do I mean by that? Well when Europe was Pagan, their main religious celebrations followed the cycle of the seasons and the sun and the moon...

And when Europe became Christianized, the church leaders attempted to leverage the pre-existing celebrations of the winter and spring solstices and redeem them, reform them.

So they arranged for the celebration of Christmas and the Resurrection of Christ during those times – and thus we celebrate Christmas and Easter around the winter and spring solstices...

And that’s fine – as long as that’s not the extent of our high points in celebrating the life and work of Christ.

So to make sure that we don’t develop an “only Christmas and Easter Faith” we are celebrating and learning about the importance and significance of Jesus’ accession this morning.

And it’s a simple event really... as it’s recounted by Luke in the book of Acts.

The disciples and Jesus are out on a picnic... eating together as they have been doing over the past forty days since Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus is instructing them and teaching them – and after clarifying that the promised power from the Holy Spirit is not so much about returning political autonomy to the nation of Israel, but rather more about spreading the news about Jesus and the blessings of the Kingdom of God to the ends of the earth - Jesus is taken up from them.

The disciples see Jesus rise up into the clouds... and they just stand there – staring up into the sky, wondering perhaps what this all means...

But they aren't allowed the luxury of speculation for long, even as they are watching Jesus ascending... two angels come up next to the disciples and say "Hey...psst... down here... why are you still here, looking up? - He'll come back eventually the same way He went up... but in the meantime don't you have somewhere you're supposed to be waiting?"

In other words go do what He said, go wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Holy Spirit which he promised.

Friends, the disciples needed some explanation of what was going on here.

Was this a test of Jesus' ability to see how high he could levitate, or was he showing off some new and improved ability of his resurrected body?

No, the angels reveal to the disciples that Jesus had been "taken up into heaven" into the presence of God the Father. He had ascended! What an amazing event, with some pretty important implications!

Later on Peter would write that since Jesus is one "*who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand....*" That "*angels, authorities and powers [are] in submission to him*" (1 Peter 3:22)

And the Apostle Paul builds on this sentiment in his letter to the Romans when he writes *“Who then is the one who condemns? No one.”* Why? Because *“Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”* (Rom 8:34)

It’s like Jesus took Satan’s place in heaven - because Satan used to stand before God accusing us but Jesus’ work on the cross revoked Satan’s position as our accuser.

Rev 12:10 says *“For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.”*

And there is more significance to be discovered in Jesus’ ascension if we think back to when Jesus said to his disciples. *“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”* (John 14:12)

In fact Jesus makes it plain that the very continuance of His ministry, and the fulfillment of God’s plan to save the world... which started all the way back in the Garden of Eden with a promise about a serpent’s head being crushed... is dependent upon his ascension.

He says to the disciples *“Truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you...”*

You see friends, unless Christ goes to the Father, unless Christ ascends to Heaven, the Holy Spirit will not be sent to us, nor will we have any authority given to us.

“But,” Jesus says *“if I go, I will send him to you.”*

And that’s a good thing friends because when the Spirit is sent *“he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment,*

because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”

(John 16:7-11)

You see friends, it's important to realize that without Christ's ascension there would be no Holy Spirit to convict people of their sin and enable them to have faith in Christ.

And believers would not have the power to accomplish great works for God's Kingdom...

And Christ would not have authority over all other powers – spiritual, political, and natural- in this world and his ability to intercede on our behalf would not mean as much coming from on earth.

Friends, without the Ascension the amazing events of Easter would have just fizzled out among Jesus' immediate followers - and we wouldn't be gathered here this morning, some two thousand years later, exploring... celebrating the importance of the Ascension!

But here we are... and we have faith and we trust in Jesus Christ as our sin substitute - the proof that indeed the Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts; proof that there was indeed power given to Christ's followers so they can fulfill the great commission they have been authorized to undertake - making disciples of all nations, to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

The Spirit is doing what He was sent to do among us, and in this world, by the ascended Christ.

And that initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit among the disciples in Jerusalem, the celebration of Pentecost - is yet another highlight in the Christian faith.

It's so important, that its part of the annual Church calendar – and here at Valleyview we don't even wait for it to come around on the Church calendar – we like keep the momentum going from Easter and the Ascension so we're going to celebrate it next week!

And friends, think of all that has been done for God's Kingdom since that day by those who have been empowered by the Holy Spirit and given Christ's authority.

Truly, in many ways Christ's followers have done what he did – heal the sick, raise the dead, perform miracles... we certainly see the Apostles doing those things and they continue to happen across this world as the church advances against the Kingdom of Darkness.

And we have also done greater things than He has... just as He said they would.

Now that might seem a bit odd – but consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:11 *¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation...*

Friends I think it helps to understand that in doing "greater" works than Jesus we are not competing or thinking that we

can do something more important or impressive than His work of salvation. That misses the point.

Rather Jesus lays the foundation – Jesus is the foundation and to do greater works is really about doing "further work" on that foundation.

So consider the growth of the church.

After his resurrection, Jesus' followers numbered about 120 men and women. Yet on the day the Holy Spirit was poured out Peter and the rest of the disciples lead three thousand people to faith in Jesus Christ!

They did "greater – further" works than what Christ had.

And Jesus never wrote anything down – but the disciples authored the gospels and numerous letters which have become part of Holy Scripture and have been read by millions of people over the past two thousand years.

They did "greater – further" works than what Christ had.

And since that time think of all the charity work, the efforts to care for the sick, the outcast, the orphans that has gone on in Jesus name, in the Spirit's power...

We have done "greater – further" work that what Christ did...

And think of all the languages which have been learned in order to share the gospel and translate the scriptures...

Think of all the study and reflection of scripture and the insights that have been written down to strengthen people's faith in Christ that has occurred by the Spirit.

Think of all the music that has been composed, the works of art that have been created, the buildings that have been built, the money that has been given... which has been inspired by the Spirit.

And think of all the study and observation and understanding of the creation – created by the Word which became flesh - that has taken place as the Spirit renews our original calling as

stewards of God's creation – of being made in the Image of God.

Friends – we have done greater... further works... in the Spirit's power, with Christ's authority... all because Christ ascended...

And friends, we should take special note of that authority. Christ was raised up to God's right hand – which is a position of authority "*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked...*" (Eph 1:21)

And this means that Christ has more authority than Buddha, Mohammed, Gandhi, or any other religious tradition, or government, or law, or social construct that people might believe in – no matter how loving, peaceful, or moral those things might be.

In fact Christ is the only authority.

This is important for us to hear and believe friends. Because in our pluralistic social context we often feel, and are actually told, that we Christians have no basis to make claims to the absolute truth... but we do!

Christ has ascended, and He ascended to the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty...

And the Hand of the King exercises the all the power and authority of the King – Jesus has ultimate power and authority, and he has made us his ambassadors and we carry His authority as we act in his name.

So He is not just the Risen Christ – He is the Risen and Ascended Christ!

And He is not just the only name by which we are saved, He is the only name in which there is ultimate power and authority, the only name worthy of worship and trust.

So we are not just forgiven people, we are forgiven, and victorious and authorized and empowered people.

And instead of this fact being exclusive, and restricting humanity's access to their Creator, as some would complain – Christ's ascended humanity actually means that anyone who is human can have a relationship with God through Him.

As the writer of Hebrews states *“we have a high priest who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence”* (Heb 4:15-16)

Friends the ascended Christ is our heavenly substitute - our intermediary, the one who can bring our needs, our cares, our concerns, our weaknesses directly to God, on our behalf - and he brings God's grace and mercy and help directly back to us in our times of need.

This is why Christ says *“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son”* (John 14:13)

And the good news doesn't stop there - as our high priest, our heavenly substitute, Jesus' presence in heaven isn't limited to just interceding for us.

Paul states in his letter to the Ephesians that *“God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”* (Eph 2:6)

In other words friends Jesus' ascension is our hope, our guarantee that our humanity can be in the presence of the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent everlasting divine Creator without being destroyed.

That's why I said earlier on that if Jesus was on earth interceding for us it wouldn't mean as much, because Christ's humanity would still not be in the very presence of God.

But if the Word made flesh, resurrected, and ascended can be in the very presence of God Almighty – then it is possible... no, guaranteed... that we too shall one day be in the very presence of God Almighty in our flesh.

And this will happen when we have been resurrected to new life – if we put our trust in the one who has already ascended there – our Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends listen to how this coming reality is described in Revelation.

John writes *“The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the*

sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22:3-5)

Isn't that amazing – all this happens - because Christ ascended!

So friends... Christmas is momentous; Easter is significant, but the Ascension... that pulls everything together and caps it all off and sets the stage for Pentecost.

And for us this morning, perhaps the best way to celebrate the Ascension is to pay attention to the angels' words: “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky?”

And we need to hear them spoken to us... *“People of Valleyview, why do you stand here looking into the sky?”*

You see friends, until Christ returns in the same way He ascended, we live in the time where the Spirit has been poured out upon us so that we are empowered to fulfill Jesus words.

“whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these “

So friends we can do greater... further... things based on Christ's work – the power is available to us, it has been poured out for us and we have been given authority in Jesus name!

Christ is Ascended – He is Ascended indeed! Amen.