



# First Things ~ May, 2023

## On Christ's Ascension I Now Build

Ascension Day is the Rodney Dangerfield of church festivals – it *don't get no respect* (and if you're under 50 and wondering who Rodney Dangerfield is, watch [THIS](#)). Many (most?) churches – even WELS churches – don't have worship services anymore because attendance was so meager. (Okay, some WELS churches with schools DO have Ascension Day worship.)

A big reason why Ascension Day *don't get no respect* is that almost always Ascension Day falls in May, and May is an incredibly busy month nowadays. This year, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary's Assignment (of new graduates as pastors) Day – always the third Thursday in May – falls on Ascension Day too.

And here at First Lutheran, with the Sunday before it being Mother's Day and the Sunday after it being the day we have Confirmation and First Communion, Jesus' ascension into heaven will be even less apparent.

While we may not celebrate Ascension Day the way we once did, I pray that we never lose sight of the great comfort that the message of Ascension Day gives.

To review, the Bible teaches that Jesus remained on earth in visible form for forty days after he rose from the dead. He wasn't always with his disciples, but Luke records that **he gave many convincing proofs that he was alive** (Acts 1:3) during this time. On the first Ascension Day, Jesus took his disciples for a little walk, east out of Jerusalem, up to the top of the Mount of Olives near Bethany and then...**he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight** (Acts 1:9).

We confess the fact in the Apostles Creed, *He rose again the third day from the dead, he descended into hell, he ASCENDED into heaven.* But what happened then? The Creed continues, *he is sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.* I must confess that when I was a kid, I heard these words and pictured God the Father as having a huge right hand on which Jesus was sitting, like a celestial Lay-Z-Boy.



But what the Bible describes is infinitely better. It's the Apostle Paul who gives us the term "right hand:" [God] **seated** [Jesus] **at his RIGHT**

**HAND in the heavenly realms** (Ephesians 1:20). And then he shows why that is so important and so comforting. The right hand of God is not a place, but a position of honor and glory: **far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the age to come.**

And Paul then brings it all to a climax: **And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be HEAD OVER EVERYTHING FOR THE CHURCH, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**

In other words, Jesus – the God-Man – ascended into heaven and it is there that he is ruling over the whole world. More than that, he is directing the events of the world for the benefit of the Church, that is, his believers. Sometimes – maybe often – in our world and in our lives it may be easy to lose sight of that fact. The Bible declares that things are not always the way they appear on the surface. The Bible declares that Jesus knows what is going on in our world and in our lives. More than that, Scripture tells us that Jesus is in control. And most importantly, God’s Word tells us that he has a plan and a purpose to use everything that happens to us and around us in order to bless us and take us to his side in heaven. That’s why we can sing:

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 shall come and call them.

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.

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.

## **As The Weather Gets Nicer**

A number of years ago, a neighboring pastor told me about one of his member families. For many years they attended worship quite regularly. Then one summer, they just seemed to drop off the face of the earth; he never saw them even once. When he finally caught up with them and asked why they weren’t in worship for 3+ months, they replied, “*Oh, we just needed a break from church.*”

Forgive me, but that makes as much sense as saying, “*I need to take a break from breathing.*”  
Worship – that is meeting together for prayer and praise, and hearing God’s Word – that is a Christian’s air.

We all need rest. And rest often includes time away from work. But don’t forget about the other, more important, kind of rest which our Lord Jesus talked about: ***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you REST. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find REST FOR YOUR SOULS*** (Matthew 11:28,29).

So, as you plan your time away from home, don't forget your worship.

If you're gone for a weekend, we have **Monday evening worship** at 6:30 PM, or watch the worship service you missed – our website, [KeepChristFirst.com](http://KeepChristFirst.com), will direct you to our church's Vimeo page so you can watch the worship services you missed.

Being away from home also gives you the opportunity to **worship at other WELS congregations**. You can find other WELS congregations and their worship service schedule by going to [WELS.net](http://WELS.net) and clicking on [Find a Church/School](#). Or just call the church office or me, and we'll help you out.

## Looking Ahead To Our Worship

Sunday, May 14 is **Mother's Day** and also the **Examination Sunday** for our three confirmands, Jonah Christiansen, Parker Gross, and Johnny Holub.

Thursday, May 18 is **Ascension Day**. We won't be having a worship, but **St. John's** in **Nodine** will at 7:00 PM.

Then Sunday, May 21 is Confirmation and First Communion. We'll have a **cake & coffee reception** afterwards in the church entryway.

And Sunday, June 28 is **Pentecost** when we'll celebrate the risen Lord sending the Holy Spirit to his Church.

Looking ahead to June:

- The first Sunday after Pentecost, June 4, is traditionally called **Trinity Sunday**.
- I'll be away (at the WELS Taste of Missions event) Sunday, June 11 and Monday, June 12, but **Pastor Jon Wolff** from Caledonia will be pinch hitting for me here.
- Starting the next Sunday, June 18 (Father's Day), we'll begin our **Summer Sermon Series** with texts coming from the Old Testament book of **Joshua**.

You may recall that I preached sermons on the **Life of Abraham**, with texts coming from Genesis, in 2020. In 2022, we heard sermons on the **Life of Moses**, with texts coming from Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The book of Joshua continues the story of God's People as they enter and conquer the Land of Canaan.

## Coming Up

You can join Sue and me at the [WELS Taste of Missions](#) which will be held at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin on Saturday, June 10.



[WELS Night at the Brewers](#) will take place on July 7. And, just so you know, I did contact WELS and asked if they could arrange **WELS Night at the TWINS** for us Minnesotans!!!

The [Lutheran Women's Missionary Society \(LWMS\) Convention](#) will take place at the La Crosse Center [June 22-25](#).

You can learn more about it [HERE](#).

You can register to attend [HERE](#).

Even if you don't register, do consider attending the **opening service** on [Thursday, June 22](#) at 7:00 PM at the La Crosse Center – it's a great experience!



## April at First Lutheran

1. **Worship** – Sunday at 9:00 AM and Monday evening at 6:30 PM
2. **Sunday Bible Study** will be wrapping up on May 7 & 14 as we study about **creation** and the **food** in preparation for the upcoming trip to the Creation Museum and Ark Encounter
3. **CrossTalk**, our children's ministry, will meet on May 7 & 14 after worship
4. **Monday Bible Study** is studying the great chapters of the New Testament at 9:00 AM
5. **Confirmation Class** has only one class (May 3) before examination on May 14 and confirmation on May 21
6. **Choir** rehearses on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM on May 3, 10, and 17
7. **First Women** will be meet on Saturday, May 13 at 10:00 AM
8. **Board for Lay Ministry** will meet on Monday, May 15 at 7:30 PM
9. **First Steps Early Learning Center Business Team** will meet on Tuesday, May 16 at 6:30 PM



## Flourish 2023

St. John's Lutheran Church of Lewiston will be hosting the **Flourish 2023 Retreat for women** on [Saturday, August 26](#). Find out more information, including the topics for sessions and presenter bios, [HERE](#).

Early Bird registration is May 1 – July 31.

*God Bless,*

*Pastor Mark*