

## *Worship Our Ascended Lord*

- *With opened minds (vv.44-49)*
- *And blessed hearts (vv.50-53)*

In the name of Jesus Christ, our crucified, risen and ascended Lord, dear fellow disciples:

“What are you doing here?” It’s the same question anyone could have asked Jesus’ disciples behind locked doors on Easter evening, then again forty days later when our text ends on Ascension Thursday. “What are we doing here?” is a good question for us this day which is barely a blip on the radar of most Christians in America. One man asked me this morning where I’d be this afternoon and evening. He describes himself as a good Catholic / prolific Protestant with seven children and an Irish name. But no other name would bring us together this evening except one. And this Name explains to a “Pre-Vatican II Catholic” in a class a few years ago who asked why we Lutherans worship when we don’t have to for works or merits. One grateful task is on our minds tonight: **Worship Our Ascended Lord.**

- *With opened minds (vv.44-49)*

Fact is, it’s a miracle that anyone wants to **Worship Our Ascended Lord**, especially any American. We’ve been trying so hard for so long to be “open minded,” it seems as if a hole has developed for our brains to fall out with our minds, hearts and souls right behind. When we sinful mortals try to open our minds, we end up with a God-shaped hole in the soul that invariably fills with other gods and other spirits. We get totally cluttered with every strange idea that comes along a keep going after it like moths in a street light. And even church people who think they have the problem licked don’t.

If you know the true God as the Savior God of the Bible, if you’re loyal to the Son of God and still faithfully worshipping as you promised on your Confirmation Day, you’re still vulnerable. Remember how faithful Joshua reacted when Eldad and Medad refused Moses’ summons and were prophesying in the camp? *“Moses, my lord, stop them!”* he cried. *But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”* (Numbers 11:26-29) It’s surprising how often we close our minds to spreading God’s Word.

Do you remember “Boanerges” and how they got their name? The “Sons of Thunder” were so called by Jesus when James and John wanted Him to call down thunder and lightning on a Samaritan village that refused to welcome Him as He headed for Jerusalem. Jesus rebuked them and went on to the next village. The point of all this is that far too often we come to worship for the wrong reasons.

Easter evening, forty days before the Ascension while the disciples were still locked up in fear, Jesus had to come and convince them that He had truly risen. The Emmaus disciples had run back with exciting news about seeing Jesus just as they were told Simon Peter had. *“Peace be with you,”* they heard Jesus say as He suddenly stood there among them. Thinking He was a ghost, made them frightened and troubled. But He ate some broiled fish in front of them and then launched into our mind-opening text, to give them the only kinds of opened minds that can truly **Worship Our Ascended Lord.**

*He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”* The Greek original makes me think of Jesus as an electrician connecting all the circuits between the Old and New Testaments. In miraculous detail over 1500 years the Holy Spirit had been inspiring His holy writers to prophesy a Messiah who would both

suffer and rule. None of the ancient Jews or Jesus' disciples wanted the suffering part. What sinful human being would ever imagine such a scenario. But from Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms came the promises of God that could only be fulfilled on the cross, in the empty tomb, and finally on the Mount of Olives. The wires were to be connected for the entire world from this Treasure of the Jewish nation to remove sinful doubts and fears for all the years. ***"You are witnesses of these things,"*** Jesus told His disciples. ***"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*** In a few weeks on Pentecost we'll see all that unfold. But for now just look at what Jesus did. He took His disciples' doubts and fears away by forty days of special appearances to His chosen witnesses to give them **opened minds** to love this Christ more than life itself.

- ***And blessed hearts (vv.50-53)***

We don't know if Matthew's record of the Great Commission is here at Jesus' Ascension on the Mount of Olives. It seems to be a commentary for the whole forty days from Easter to Ascension where Matthew (28:17) writes of the eleven disciples: ***"When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted."*** Can you relate? I sure can. The doubts and fears that crowd out my sleep at night sometimes are embarrassing when morning dawns. Flat on my face on the living room floor, I have to pour out my heart to God for guidance about my life and ministry and the way God wants me to follow Jesus as I lead my family and His congregation of believers. It's frightening, but, oh, so true, that I am no better than these disciples with all their advantages of listening to Jesus year after year. Our New Man wants to worship Him in spirit and in truth, but our Old Adam keeps coming up with more reasons to be afraid and to question His will and His Word. What a sorry state we'd be in if not for His gracious blessing.

Dr. Martin Luther says in one of his writings, "The Bible isn't filled with good wishes. It contains real blessings that actually come to pass. We have these kinds of blessings in the New Testament through Christ. We receive a blessing when the pastor says, 'Receive forgiveness for your sins.' If he were to say, 'I wish that God would show you favor and mercy, give you eternal life, and forgive your sins,' it would be merely an expression of love. Instead, he says, 'I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.' These words have the power to actually forgive you, if you believe."<sup>1</sup>

And that's what we have in these last verses of our text in a word that occurs three times. It's one "blessing" after another. Jesus raised His nail-pierced hands to convey God's favor when He ***"blessed them."*** He was still ***"blessing them"*** when He was parted from them and taken into heaven. And according to the KJV, ***"[They] were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God,"*** wishing Him the same favored success for His saving Word and will as He had conferred on them.

His blessing still works today. We don't come to worship because we're such special Christians that we have no doubts and fears or because we've made such a solid choice for God. As His disciples, He chose us ***"to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last."*** (John 15:16) In His kindness He gives us faith to trust Him. We bring our doubts and fears for His patient love to take away at the foot of the cross in God-blessed repentance. The last thing Jesus our Brother did on this earth was to bless His disciples. He is still granting us His gracious blessing from God's right hand where He fills heaven and earth. One of us is ruling all things with divine power and love. He who will not let a sparrow fall without His knowledge and knows the exact number of the hairs of our head, has the awesome power and love to help us in every need. His Word and sacrament chase away our fears. His promised Holy Spirit keeps the blessings coming for heart and home. He brought us together to **Worship Our Ascended Lord**. And as we return from this place tonight, He will help us worship Him in the best way of all by telling others. He wants to give them healthy **opened minds** and **blessed hearts**. Praise God in the highest heavens. Amen.

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