

The Ascension of Our Lord

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Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
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Revelation 19:11-16 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:
King of kings and Lord of lords.

"Vindication in Christ's Victory"

Every parent gets to hear it more often than they would like. Why? Why do I have to wear a coat when it's 20 degrees outside? Why do I have to brush my teeth? Why can't we have a swimming pool like my friends? Some questions are easy to answer. Some questions make you just want to roll your eyes and ignore them.

Then you get a question, thankfully pretty rarely, when someone asks why do we even have a Mother's Day. Moms force themselves to take a deep breath. Dads slowly walk away from a volatile situation, slowly gather themselves and then take a moment to decide if this is one of those questions worth answering or not. Do they go into a long, detailed explanation about the history of the holiday and the ways we so often take moms for granted that it's the least we can do to recognize them one day each year. Or, do you just say 'because' and add another item to your online gift shopping cart?

Jesus could probably approach the day of his ascension about the same way. There is a lengthy, detailed explanation why he did what he had to do. Then there is the simple explanation that he is "**King of kings and Lord of lords.**" (Revelation 19:16) Actually, in these verses from Revelation chapter 19, we get a little bit of both. We get to bask in his victory as our King. And we get to share in the simple reality of his rule. For us, that's the important part. We find vindication in Christ's victory.

When Jesus ascends, it must be a pretty powerless feeling. Think of the amazing things they had witnessed in their short time with Jesus. He had healed the sick. He cast out demons. He raised the dead. He put haters and critics in their place with his wisdom when they tried to challenge him. Most amazing of all, they were able to witness the truth that he had defeated death at his own resurrection. They must have so many plans for Jesus. Their heads are just swimming with dreams of world domination. And now, poof, he's gone.

You don't have to be part of the group on the Mount of Olives trying to pick your jaw up off ground to relate to that. Parents put in the hard work of raising children. There aren't any

shortcuts. So you read the books and ask for advice, even breaking down and looking for hints from your own parents. You do what you are supposed to do. But the results from the children don't always turn out the way they are supposed to. It seems these little humans are determined to prove they're not robots, not machines that when given the right inputs will spit out the proper product. And so we can relate, at least a little bit, to the powerless feeling the disciples must have experienced on that first day of Ascension.

The powerless feeling takes on a whole new sense of urgency when we come to grips with the kind of world we are living in. There is simply no sense trying to pretend everything will always be easy. There's no guarantee that naivety will be rewarded. Good parenting means preparing children to live in the real world. And we could say the same for the way Jesus treats his disciples. There is a version of religion that sounds appealing. It leaves you feeling good because it gets rid of all the parts that are hard to understand and all the parts that are uncomfortable to swallow.

C.S. Lewis, a famous author and defender of the Christian faith put it this way: "There are only two views that face all the facts. One is the Christian view that this is a good world that has gone wrong, but still retains the memory of what it ought to have been. The other is... the belief that there are two equal and independent powers at the back of everything, one of them good and the other bad, and that this universe is the battlefield in which they fight out an endless war."¹ We won't get into a lengthy description of Dualism. We can just focus on the reality of living in a fallen world. We don't even really need too many examples to prove this is not a perfect place.

But the bigger question is how we handle the reality of our earthly existence in this fallen world. So often it feels like Jesus is far away or things in this world are beyond his control. Or at least if he knows about what's going on, he doesn't do anything drastic about it. Do you have those times when you react like a child who looks around and notices mom isn't anywhere to be found? Do you have one of those faithless freak outs?

That's probably not even what you are trying to do. But you feel like you have some sort of control over your work. So you pour yourself more and more into your job. School is a great way to prepare yourself for success and leave yourself less vulnerable to what other people decide. So that becomes a main focus in life. You decide you are just going to enjoy life as much as possible. So that's what you love. Meaningful relationships with people make life more enjoyable. So you turn to them with all your heart. We turn our efforts at good things into things that will bring us ultimate meaning.

People of faith have our own unique twists on dealing with the reality of living in this fallen world. We look to ourselves and see a need to develop a deeper, stronger faith. We reason we should be able to find more power in our own faith and rely on ourselves against the unknown and unnumbered enemies out there. We know we have made progress and just need to keep trying harder. Again, we are looking to ourselves and putting so much emphasis on our faith that we forget the real source of strength.

¹ C.S. Lewis. Mere Christianity, p. 42

Then Jesus steps onto the scene in Revelation 19. Here's how we see him: **"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war."** (Revelation 19:11) Jesus shows us we've been seeking power in the wrong places. The image comes into greater focus: **"His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself."** (Revelation 19:12) Without Jesus as our conquering King, we are still weak and vulnerable.

Two basic reasons why people don't believe in Jesus: either they don't know what the Bible says about Jesus or they don't like what the Bible says about Jesus. Part of this picture of Jesus in Revelation 19 is a bit disturbing. He see Jesus: **"He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God."** (Revelation 19:13) Jesus is a conqueror because he has to defeat real enemies. This might not be the Jesus we prefer to see. Especially if you idea of Jesus is that guy with sandals and long hair, essentially coming out of some hippie commune. But even if you might not prefer the Jesus of the Bible, he just might be the Jesus you actually want.

Sometimes moms, mothers who generally pride themselves on being in control and calm, get into momma bear mode. When children are threatened or in danger, mom just won't stand for it. She will spring into action and do whatever it takes to defend her young. That's the Jesus we see in Revelation 19. He puts his very real power to use in unexpected ways. But he does it for his children. And we get to see a real contrast between Jesus' first coming and his coming for his people at the end of time. The first time, he came in humility, riding on a donkey. When he comes back it will be on a white stallion. After that humble entrance he was stripped in ultimate degradation. When he returns, it will be dressed in splendor, splattered in the blood of his enemies. At first he was abused by a crown of thorns. At the end, he will take crowns from every earthly ruler and accept the worship of his people who willingly place their crowns at his feet. In his moment of deepest need, he was abandoned by his disciples. When he comes back it will be with an army of pure, angelic warriors. He was whipped and beaten, but will come with a sharp sword and iron staff. His rights were trampled on by the religious leaders and justice denied by the Romans, but he will tread all who reject his gracious rule in the winepress of God's furious anger.

Today we honor mothers. And rightfully so. The only tragedy is that we don't take the time to recognize them more often. But the most important gift we can give them is Jesus. Because even the best mothers out there need someone to be that momma bear for them. The most amazing moms need someone who can sacrifice and serve them. We all need someone who will be there for us at our worst and our best, someone with compassion and firmness, love and strength, judgment and forgiveness. All of us need a King like Jesus. We want to enjoy living in his victory.

He gives us this vision in Revelation 19 because we are like those disciples waiting in that uncomfortable in between time, between his ascension and victorious return. And while we live in this present reality, Jesus wants us to live secure in his victory. Right now God raises you with Christ. God gives you Christ's victory. Grace from Jesus restores you to the position

of power and authority. We are heirs with Christ. We will reign with Christ. We will enjoy the full authority and power God originally planned for us when he brought about creation. C.S. Lewis has a memorable way of encouraging Christians to embrace Christ's victory for our vindication now: "Enemy-occupied territory — that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to church you are really listening-in to the secret wireless from our friends."²

Turning to the ultimate power source of our victorious King gives us access to the Spirit to stand firm against Satan right now. One theologian puts it this way: "There is no peace of conscience except to those who are justified by faith; there is no true love of God except in those who have a childlike trust in God. Therefore let the love of ourselves, the love of the world, the love of the creature, die in us, that the love of God may dwell in us; and may God begin that love in us in this life, that he may perfect it in life eternal."³

What is God doing? What is he up to? And why is he doing it? We don't get all the answers. But we have the assurance that God is doing what the best of human mothers do on their best days. God knows what he is doing. God is in charge. God is watching over his children and maneuvering to keep his ultimate goal for us in mind.

Jesus is not a tame or timid King. But he is your King. And you get to join in his victory celebration. You get to celebrate his vindication. Amen.

² C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*, p. 46.

³ Johann Gerhard. *Sacred Meditations*, p. 54.