

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Ascension Day, May 26, 2022

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 212, 214:5, 213, 216, 218:6.
Lessons: Daniel 7: 9-14, Acts 1: 1-11, Luke 24: 44-53
Sermon Text: John 14:1-4
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Aren't there lots of things that we prepare for? Nearly every day we are preparing for something, often for many things. We prepare for our day – whether to go off to school or to those things God has called us to. We prepare meals. We prepare for the next day. We prepare to go to worship services and Bible classes.

Some things require even more preparation. We make great preparations for a new place to live: we clean things up, we scrub things down, we paint things. We make everything look just right. We make the inside of the new house just right, and we prepare so that the outside looks just right, too. So we are no strangers to preparations. Everyone on earth is involved with some kinds of preparation again and again.

You heard from Acts chapter 1 about Jesus leaving earth. His hardest work was done. That work was done when he was dying on the cross and said, "It is finished." He commended himself into the hands of his heavenly Father, because his work of paying the price for our sins was complete.

Then he came back to life, a seemingly impossible idea. Then he spent 40 days on earth with his followers teaching them more about his work and the work he was preparing them for. Ascension Day, the day he ascended bodily into heaven, is the 40th day after Easter. You heard in our Gospel lesson from Luke how *"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. You are witnesses of these things.'"* Luke 24:45-49 (NIV)

Then came the day of the Ascension. You heard him say *"'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."* Acts 1:8-9 (NIV)

Where did he go? You know the answer. Your confession of the Apostolic Creed announces that you believe that "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence [from that place] He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

Then you also confess and believe about the Holy Ghost, that "He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers; And will at the last day raise up me and all the dead, And give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true."

So what is Jesus doing in heaven at the right hand of His Heavenly Father? Yes, he is ruling all things, even the little things in our lives. But he is also preparing for our coming to him on judgment day. One of the best pictures of that preparation is found in our sermon text today: The King James Version tells us that he said: *"I go to prepare a place for you."* Yes, it is true:

JESUS HAS GONE TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR US

- 1. Remember who is speaking.**
- 2. Remember what it is that he is preparing.**
- 3. Remember what he is preparing for.**

Who is this speaking? It is Jesus, your Redeemer, the one who was dead who is now alive, preparing a place for us in heaven. You hear about him every time you come to church and to Bible Class. Where else do you hear about him? Surely not at work or school or all your after-school activities. Surely not while shopping and playing in the play-places of this world. Surely not in the entertainment the world offers us. But you also hear about him in your homes when you read and hear devotional lessons and Bible stories and read from the catechism and recite the catechism.

You know who he is. The devil and the world, and your own sinful flesh want to make you forget him and what he did for you and think he isn't important. But he is important. He has words of eternal life for you.

He told his disciples before he suffered and died, and they probably didn't understand everything that he was talking about, that he was going to his Father's house, ***"there to prepare a place for you."***

He is preparing for you to come to him. He tells you: Don't worry. ***"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."*** There is nothing to worry about for the place he is preparing for you. You don't have to worry if the place is dirty, or not finished, or the painters have done a lousy job or the carpenters haven't made everything just right in that heavenly mansion. Jesus made it a perfect place. He goes on to say: ***"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."*** The word ***"rooms"*** used in the New International Version doesn't catch the entire flavor of what he is talking about. The King James Version comes closer with the word ***"mansions"***. The best flavor of the word is a place in which to abide, a place to make your home, a wonderful place, a place where ***"There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain,"*** Revelation 21:4 (NIV) as Jesus himself tells us in the book of Revelation. It is a home where you will never have to leave and where you will never want to leave. It is the kind of place where you will want to make yourself at home, and you will feel completely at ease.

We could think about what we commonly call a mansion, but this place Jesus prepares is a little different and even nicer. Some of you may recall seeing a television program many years ago called "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." There are even similar television programs today where the host will visit super-elaborate places to live, the kind called mansions, places where the living room would be much bigger than your entire house. These were the kinds of places where excess, and wealth, and money, and everything that money could buy would be "the best". Things like gold plated faucets, superbly polished marble and expensive wood, antique chairs costing thousands of dollars, everything super fancy, super expensive, super elaborate, ultra-elegant. Throughout history, wealthy people have prepared that kind of super-elaborate places to live, perhaps trying to insure for themselves the best possible things and accommodations here on earth.

But it's not just the super-rich. People feel that they have to make this world the important place. People want everything perfect, elegant, elaborate and pleasurable. They spend their riches in making this world as nice as it can be – and are usually disappointed! People are often looking for perfection on earth. And how many people haven't even tried to make something after death perfect? We look at pharaohs and kings who have prepared for a life after death by taking things of this earth into their tombs with them.

Everything of this world will come to nothing. It will not endure. When Christ comes to judge the living and the dead it will all be destroyed. Christ himself warns us: ***"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*** Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV)

You know, when I would see such mansions or palaces, I would often think that they weren't very cozy. They didn't seem like comfortable places to live. They didn't seem like the kind of place where you could put your feet up on the furniture and set your coffee cup down without worrying about leaving coffee rings on the end-tables. But the mansions, the rooms, the places in his Father's house that Jesus is preparing for us will be comfortable, cozy, and even grand places to dwell, to live in, to make our homes. After all, he has prepared them for us to enjoy forever! No sin, nothing evil, no fear, no pain, no suffering, no hurts, just happiness and joy, with Jesus himself!

This is why Jesus ascended into heaven: to prepare this place for us. And he even tells us why: ***"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."***

He is preparing for you to come and be with him. You have that assurance: If he goes to prepare a place for you, he will come back and take you to be with him. You have his word on that. He has never lied. He tells us a few verses later: ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*** John 14:6-7 (NIV)

As a pastor and a fellow Christian, I have used the words of our sermon text again and again when people are at a point in their lives when they are facing death. What greater assurance can you – or any child of God – have than what Jesus tells you here? As God’s children we are concerned about what he has done for us. We should be concerned about that, and not set our minds and hearts on earthly things.

People want things here on earth. They expect that their deeds or words will make them immortal. It won’t happen. Only faith in Jesus Christ can make you immortal. People are looking for comfortable living here on earth. And will that happen? It may. I think that many of us have a very comfortable lifestyle here on earth. But not one of us would say that this life is perfect. We must be careful that we don’t set our hearts and minds on things here on earth. We must always remember with the hymn-writer: “I’m but a stranger here, heaven is my home.”

We don’t really have to do the preparing. Jesus did all the preparing; Jesus did all the groundwork in preparing a place for us. He paid the price for our sins so that our sins and wickedness won’t hold us back. We repent and he forgives our sins.

Perhaps the closer you get to death, the more you will recognize the importance of looking forward, like Jesus did. He prepared for you. He ascended into heaven to prepare a place for you. He promised that he will come back to take you to be with him! Don’t doubt! Believe that truth! Your Savior tells you that’s the way it is! And he doesn’t lie! Amen.