

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Ascension, June 2, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 222, 219:1, 212, 214, 221:4-7.

Lessons: Psalm 91, Acts 1:1-11, Luke 24:44-53.

Sermon Text: John 14:1-3.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

These words of Jesus were spoken in the upper room on the same night in which he was betrayed. Jesus had just warned Peter that Peter would disown Jesus three times before the rooster crows. Jesus had also told his disciples, as we reported several weeks ago, *"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come."* John 13:33.

Then a little later we read: *"Simon Peter asked him, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus replied, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.' Peter asked, 'Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' Then Jesus answered, 'Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!'"* John 13:36-38.

Then John records Jesus' next words as *"Do not let your hearts be troubled."*

They trusted in him, they believed in him, and they could not imagine life without him. But you know what is going to happen. He is about to be crucified and die. That is one place he is going that they will not be able to follow him, at least not until they die. But on the Festival of the Ascension we celebrate his leaving this earth 40 days after his resurrection – in a very spectacular way. We must acknowledge that

JESUS GOES (but)

1. **He goes to prepare a place for us. (He assures us)**
2. ***"Do not let your hearts be troubled."* (because)**
3. **He will come back for us.**

He goes into heaven, to prepare a place there for us.

I cannot think of many places in Scripture where we find words that are more comforting, particularly at the death of a loved one who died in Christ. Of course Scripture gives us many words appropriate for the death of a Christian, but I have always thought these words to be really special. Jesus himself tells us that he is going to prepare a place for us, in the mansions of his heavenly father.

Now the first place where Jesus was going was to the cross, to be crucified. Leading up to the cross would be the suffering in the garden of Gethsemane, his capture by the leaders of the Jews and the Roman soldiers led by Judas, his trial – if you dare call it that – in front of the high priest, his mockery of a trial before Pilate, his suffering, and finally his crucifixion and death.

But in these very words of our text Jesus is particularly pointing to heaven. I especially love the King James Version: *"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."* John 14:1-3 (KJV)

"Mansions" is a beautiful word for a beautiful place to live. Some of you have visited mansions. They show an extravagant lifestyle, beautiful furnishings, and elegant rooms, very often in a beautiful setting, a gorgeous place to live. But to begin with, these *"rooms"*, as the New International Version translates, are in

Jesus' Father's house in heaven. He is the one who is your father also, as you read in Galatians 3:26: ***"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,"***

But before Jesus went to heaven to prepare a place for all who believe in him, he died on the cross, after suffering all the torments of hell. He suffered what you deserved. And not only what you deserved, but you and you and you and you and me and every human being deserved.

Jesus bodily, physically ascended into heaven and left this earth, as you heard in both our epistle lesson and in our Gospel lesson. And here in our sermon text is one place that Jesus clearly, leaving no doubt, specifically, very pointedly, very plainly tells us exactly why he is going to leave the earth. He is going to prepare a place for all those who believe in him.

He tells us what is waiting for us. He tells us ***"In my Father's house are many rooms." "In my Father's house are many mansions."*** Of course he is talking about heaven, the place where God dwells. That is a picture from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. We read in 2 Chronicles 20:6 ***"O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand, and no one can withstand you."*** In Hebrews 9:24 we read how Christ ***"entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence."*** Heaven is waiting for us with all its joys.

Jesus is also reminding his disciples that he has never lied to them. He has always told the truth. ***"If it were not so, I would have told you."***

And what kind of place is this? It is a place of no sin, no suffering, no pain, no tears. It is a place where we will enjoy forever the joys of being with Jesus, with the Father, and with the Holy Spirit. John writes in Revelation about the new heaven and the new earth, the Holy City, the New Jerusalem: ***"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"*** Revelation 21:3-4

There are some who mock heaven and suggest it will be a boring place with people floating around on clouds, and playing harps. Certainly not! We don't really know the full blessings of heaven. Scripture gives us some veiled, partial pictures of heaven. It will be a place with no sin, no anxiety, no suffering or pain and we will be in the presence of our Savior and all saints, that is, all believers!

Jesus is going there. But he does not leave us comfortless. Just before he ascended into heaven, he told his disciples ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you."*** The first time his followers received power was when the Holy Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost, 10 days after his ascension into heaven. The remarkable power they received allowed them, at that time, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in languages they had never learned. Surely they were not just making sounds that they did not understand. They were preaching the gospel, and understanding what they were saying.

He tells us in our text ***"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."*** Do not be upset, do not be agitated. No matter how many times God tells us 'don't worry, don't be troubled', our sinful flesh worries and is troubled. We need to hear those words of God again and again.

How often aren't our hearts troubled by things that turn out to be a waste of worrying. Time and again we worry about things that are going to happen, or things that are not going to happen, or terrible things, or things that trouble us, or the unknown. But Jesus tells us, and we have to remind ourselves, that we are not to worry, that our hearts are not to be troubled. We are not to worry, because God plainly tells us in Scripture, ***"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*** Romans 8:28

And if evil does come upon us, God assures us in our Old Testament lesson ***"If you make the Most High your dwelling-- even the LORD, who is my refuge -- then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."*** Psalms 91:9-12.

Especially in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow. ***"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the***

other. You cannot serve both God and Money. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:24-34.

Do not let your hearts be troubled! If there is one thing that old-age can tell us it can tell us that what God says is true, really is true, although old age alone is not what teaches us that. It is having lived long enough believing in Jesus Christ to realize that all the things that we worry about, that we are troubled about, are things that God will and does take care of. But not until we are in those heavenly mansions will all worry be ended. We have learned that God has taken care of us and we can rejoice, as God's people did when *"Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us."* 1 Samuel 7:12. *"Thus far has the LORD helped us."* And we have Jesus himself assuring us shortly before he ascended into heaven in Matthew 28:20: *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* *"Unto the end of the world."*

That place in heaven which Jesus is preparing for us is a place with many mansions for believers, for us, to live in. Those mansions will be our dwelling places, our home eternally, not just as long as we make payments!

Jesus is leaving the earth. But he promises that he will come again. He tells us in our text plainly *"I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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."*

Do you remember the angels speaking at his ascension? After Jesus disappeared from their sight, just like a helium balloon we let go and it disappears into the sky, his disciples *"were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'" Acts 1:10-22.*

Matthew makes it clear for us: *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'" Matthew 25:31-34*

Yes, Jesus has left the earth. But make no mistake. Because he goes to prepare a place for us in heaven, we have no reason to worry, to let our hearts be troubled. He will come again to take us and all believers to be with him. Amen.