

Easter 7C, 2013

Text: John 17:20-26

Title: God's Right Hand Man

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On Thursday we celebrated Jesus' ascension to God's right hand. Every week we confess that Jesus "ascended into heaven" in the creed.

So if Jesus is in heaven at God's right hand, what is he doing now? Is Jesus on vacation? Does He finally get to relax after all the hard work of dying and rising again and then convincing everyone that he really did rise? Jesus has earned some time off, hasn't he? Perhaps He's relaxing in some heavenly spa getting a nice angel massage, sipping on a tropical drink. Is that what Jesus is doing now until He returns?

Well, heaven isn't exactly a place, in the same way that Oak Lawn is a place or Chicago or Detroit or Cleveland are places. Heaven is where God is. And God certainly isn't in just one place. God is everywhere.

And God's right hand is wherever God is at work doing stuff. I'm sorry to inform all you lefties out there, but God's right handed. Wherever you see or hear God at work, that's His right hand getting the job done. That's where Jesus is, doing His Father's will.

In the ancient world, the king would sit on his throne, but on his right would be a chair, and that's where his number two man would sit, his right hand man, usually his oldest son. This right hand man would make sure that all the king's laws and orders got enforced, that everything was done according to the king's will. He acted with the king's authority.

That is Jesus' role now. He is at God the Father's right hand, administering the kingdom on His Father's behalf.

God is still at work in the world through Jesus Christ. God wasn't just at work in the world a long time ago when He created it, when He freed the Israelites or when He died on the cross. God is still at work here and now, and He sends out His servants, His apostles, His pastors to speak and work on His behalf.

That's what was going on in Acts. The apostles were a man down after Judas died, and they needed another to keep doing Jesus' work.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He wasn't done working, and neither were the disciples. They were sent out to preach and teach and forgive on Jesus' behalf, to be Jesus' right hand men. And so Matthias was added that day, and many, many more have been added since.

Where is Jesus now, what is Jesus doing now? Look for a pastor. Jesus is baptizing and forgiving. Jesus is blessing and visiting His people. Jesus is feeding them with His body and

blood. When a pastor forgives your sins, he speaks “in the stead and by the command of my Lord, Jesus Christ.” Pastors don’t forgive your sins, Jesus does.

Where’s the right hand of God? Right here, where Jesus is continuing to work here and now.

And it’s not just Pastors who get to share in Jesus’ work. Today we give thanks for moms, and grandmas and aunts and sisters and all those women who have done Jesus’ work in your life.

When your mom comforts and consoles you, when she feeds and clothes you, when she cares for you, that’s Jesus using her to do His work.

Jesus uses all of us to do some good in the lives of others, whether it’s in our families, at work, in our neighborhood, with our friends, Jesus is still at work in this world, bringing love and mercy and compassion, and He does so through you.

And that’s not all that Jesus is doing. Jesus is seated at God’s right hand.

On the one hand, Jesus’ work goes from the Father, through Him, and out into the world. On the other hand, Jesus’ work is directed from the people, through Him and back to God. This is Jesus’ work of praying, interceding for you.

In the ancient world, when people had requests for the king, they rarely approached him directly. You didn’t just walk up to a king and ask him for something, just like you don’t just stroll into the oval office and ask the president for a favor. If you had a request for the king you would go through his right hand man, that man who sat next to him. You would ask him to speak on your behalf and bring your requests before the king.

And that’s what prayer is. We pray through Jesus Christ, in Jesus’ name. We ask Jesus to bring our prayers and petitions before God the Father on our behalf.

Jesus often prayed while He was here on earth. For the past three weeks, we have been hearing about what Jesus prays for you and for His whole church. Two weeks ago Jesus prayed for joy, full, complete joy that no one can take away from you. Last week Jesus prayed for peace, that in the midst of the tribulations of life in this world, you would have true, lasting peace. This week Jesus prays for unity, that you would be one, perfectly united with one another.

Now from the outset it looks like Jesus’ prayer for unity has utterly failed. Churches split and splinter. Christians fight and bicker. There are thousands of different denominations, and Christians who are neighbors but go to different churches on the opposite ends of town.

So what does unity look like, and how do we get there?

Some would say that we get to unity by ignoring our differences and agreeing to disagree. They come up with a basic, minimal statement of faith, and as long as you can agree on the basics, then all the rest can be overlooked.

And yet before Jesus ascended, He told His disciples to teach all the things that He had instructed them. Jesus doesn't say, "Just teach the basics," or "Just teach the non-controversial stuff," or "Just teach what is easy to understand." Jesus says, "everything." Our Lutheran confessions echo this when they state that for unity in the church it is enough to agree on the gospel and all its articles.

Jesus has much to say to us, all for our good. If we decide to leave parts out, because we are afraid of offending other Christians, causing controversy or exposing differences, we are not being faithful to Jesus.

Unity in our congregation and with other Christians comes only as a gift from God, and the only way for that to happen is through Jesus Christ.

Think about it like spokes in a wheel, all connected to one center hub. As long as we are connected to Jesus, we are connected to one another. If we try to achieve unity on our own without Jesus, we will certainly fail.

So how and when does this happen? The answer should be obvious. Jesus makes you one as He puts His Name on you in Holy Baptism. We all bear the name of Jesus, we all belong to Him, and so we are all part of the same family. Every week that name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is what brings us together at the beginning of the service.

Jesus makes us one as He forgives our sins. He forgives you and you forgive those who sin against you, just as in the Lord's Prayer.

Jesus makes us one as He feeds us all with His body and blood. In Holy Communion He makes us one with Him and one with one another.

Jesus prays that we are one as we are in Him and He is in us. Jesus is in you as His Name is put upon you in Holy Baptism and you are united with His death and resurrection. Jesus is in you as His word goes into your ears and into your heart. Jesus is in you as you eat and drink His body and blood.

And because we are one in Jesus, we are one in our love for one another. Jesus concludes His prayer with these words, he asks the Father "that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Jesus concludes His prayer with this request for love, that because He is in us, His love would be in us, too. Last week it was peace, the week before it was joy, and today it is love. This is how Jesus is still at work in the world today, through love. The love that we have for one another, the love that we have for God, these are all gifts from Jesus, that He brings as He lives within us.

You have Jesus in you. You are Jesus' representative here in this world. You bring Jesus' love to those around you, because Jesus is in you, Jesus is loving the world through you.

Yes, Jesus has ascended into to heaven, He is seated at God's right hand. Where is He now?  
Just look around you. This is where Jesus is, this is where Jesus is still at work, through His love  
for you, and your love for all.