

Andrew K. Frey

Ascension

Ephesians 4:7-16

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says:

**“When he ascended on high,
he led captives in his train
and gave gifts to men.”**

⁹ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (NIV 84)

Theme: Build up the Body of Christ.

1. By studying the Word.
2. By sharing the Word.

It’s been said that the main job of parents is to work themselves out of a job. That is, their main goal is bring up their children from infants to young adults; to teach and lead them; to build them up giving them knowledge and skills to be able to take care of themselves. Although a child may leave his parents to go to college or live on his own, a parent never really ceases to be a parent. They are only a short phone call away—always on hand to share insight, give advice, or to help them through a problem.

Holy Cross, Standish, MI.

May 17, 2015

Everyone grows up and matures at their pace or on their own time frame. But it is when a child leaves home that he does a lot of growing up. When they have to do things on their own, fix things, pay for things, and so on, they have to grow up quickly.

In a way, that is where we stand as part of the Holy Christian Church at Christ’s Ascension—like adolescents in need of growing up. Christ’s ascension means that he is not earth physically; he is in heaven sitting on his throne in his full glory. We are left here on earth; like a child living on his own for the first time.

Of course, Christ doesn’t leave us alone. It’s not as if he has left us all on our own to fend for ourselves. He sends us his Holy Spirit, as we will see next week on Pentecost. And he doesn’t leave us without tools. He gives us his Holy Word, and more specifically the gospel through which his Holy Spirit works in order to make us more mature. And he gives other blessings to help us grow and mature as Paul quotes Psalm 68, **When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.** When the Lord victoriously ascended into heaven, he left us not only with his Holy Word, which is completely sufficient and powerful to bring to life; he has also given certain gifts and abilities for his Word. For instance for some he has given the gift knowledge, being able to easily remember and know certain facts. Others are people persons, who are comfortable with talking with anyone about anything, even their sins and their Savior. Others are good with their hands, able help out taking care of the Lord’s house. Still others, God has richly blessed with earthly blessings which support the work and the spread of the gospel. We could go on and on.

And it is the Lord who gives us certain men to go and spread that gospel. **It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.** He has chosen some to the full-time work of the gospel ministry—to use the gifts he has blessed them with for the benefit of his Church. They preach and teach, spread the gospel, proclaim the Word, and so on. Yesterday about 85 Martin Luther College graduates received calls into the public teaching ministry to serve at WELS schools throughout the nation. Later this week around 30 will graduate from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. About 10 more will present

themselves for assignment and in a few months will be installed and ordained as Pastors in God's Church. It is our Ascended Lord who has called and placed them for the benefit of his Church.

And what is the purpose of these under shepherds of Christ, the chief-shepherd? One purpose is to equip the saints, **to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.** The Lord prepared his disciples for three years. During his ministry he not only showed and taught them who he was; but he also taught them God's Word and opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He was preparing his disciples for his Ascension, for the time when he would be gone. He would no longer be able to spread the gospel himself. So he prepared and equipped his disciples to do just that.

Jesus is in heaven; and neither are his disciples. He is not here to spread the gospel; but you are. He's not here on earth to equip you, so he sends pastors and teachers and others to equip you to do this work. But before he sends you out into the gospel; he has to equip you. He does this through the Word. It is through the Word that we see that our Ascended Lord first had to descend to earth—to come from heaven to earth live as one of us. Not once during his 30-some years on earth did he ever sins; and he gave his perfect life as he took our sins upon him and suffered the eternal punishment that our sins deserve. It is through the Word that we see that he rose from the dead and gives us his eternal victory. Through the Word you grow in the knowledge of him and through the Word he strengthens your faith. That is another reason why he sends us called works, so that we all may **reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature.** As we grow in the knowledge of God's Word we realize what is true and what is not and we become united under the one true faith. And a natural result of growing in the knowledge of God's Word is that you are better able to spread, confess, and teach his word to others.

So in order to do his work; it necessary to remain in the Word on a regular basis. Without doing so, you remain a child; only drinking milk, not solid food. And so as you live in the world and go out in the world you are easily tossed back and forth, blown with the wind, succumbing to every false teaching and charismatic false prophet. You might be disagreeing with me right now, "I don't have an infantile faith—I was confirmed after all." Sure, but what about since

then? Many still remain spiritual adolescents, going to and fro following the latest tread; or getting deceived by the latest up and coming entertainer. And instead on feeding on solid food, your diet is full of spiritual junk food. So if we want to do the work of the Lord, then we must become equipped through the good solid food of the pure Word of God.

Once we have become equipped through the Word, we are able to go out on our own and share it with others. But that's easier said than done. We can talk about it all we want; but how often do we actually do so? We have plenty of opportunities, but we fail to take advantage of them. We keep our mouths shut and our faith to ourselves. We fail to do the work that the Lord has equipped us to do. We can offer all the excuses that we want, but is just what they are—excuses. We often fail to share God's Word because we are afraid of what others may think of us.

After all Jesus has left us in this world that hates us, as we read in our second lesson for today. The world hates you because of what you believe, or don't believe and because of how you live your life. Scientists hate us because we insist that God created the world in six days about 6000 years ago despite what they claim as evidence for evolution. Certain social groups hate us because we defend what God says about sex outside of marriage including practicing homosexuality. Others hate us because the foundation of our faith depends on someone rising from the dead, which is absolutely impossible and preposterous in the eyes of so many. And still others hate us and try to kill us because we confess Christ and don't adhere to some false god called Allah. There are so many who hate us and for so many reasons, we figure it is just easier and safer to keep our mouths shut and so that is exactly what we do.

But what is the result? The body suffers. The human body is made up of a countless number of parts; each part works together in harmony for the good of all. But if one part of the body is unable or fails to do its job the rest of the body suffers. Take a knee ligament for example. It's just a small body part; but if it's torn the rest of the body is not able to function as it normally does—the mind cannot think as normal because of the pain, you are unable to run or maybe walk; lifting heavy objects or even performing other basic tasks becomes harder or maybe even impossible. So it is with the body of Christ. We have all been

given our own gifts and abilities and we use them to spread the gospel. But if one part of the Body of Christ doesn't do the job for which they were intended, then the whole body of Christ suffers.

But when the parts of a human body are all doing their job, working together in unity for the common good the body grows and prospers. That's growing up or maturing isn't it? The body gets taller or stronger. The mind learns a fact or gains an ability. The same thing can be said about the body of Christ. We are the body of Christ. Each and every one of us makes up a part of that body of believers, the Church, with our Ascended Lord as the head. And as we work together for the gospel ministry the Church as a whole matures. And the body of believers grows and grows up. As we do the work of the Lord according to the gifts and abilities he has left us with—whether that is preaching the gospel, teaching young children, supporting through financial means, volunteering to take care of the Lord's house, or what have you—the Church grows. The gospel ministry is supported and when the gospel is spread the Holy Spirit works through that gospel to bring many people to faith. The more people who hear the gospel, the more people who are taught God's Word, the more believers there will be and the body of Christ grows and matures.

Our Lord is in heaven. He is not here; but we are. He has not left us alone to fend for ourselves. Like good parents do for their children when they are away, so God has equipped us while he is in heaven. He has given us his Holy Word through which he works faith and he has given us gifts and abilities to share that word to others. And so we do our work for his glory and out of love and thanks to him.

So we grow and become more mature—first for ourselves by reading and studying the word and then we share the Word with others so that the body of Christ may grow and become mature and then when our Ascended Lord returns he may take that many more to their eternal homes. Amen.