

## Christ Is Absent And Yet Present.

Text: Mark 16:14-20

Suggested Hymns:

108, 111, 169, 501, 113

1) In What Sense Jesus Is Absent From Us

2) In What Sense Jesus Is Present With Us

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 16:14–20, <sup>14</sup> *Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.*

<sup>15</sup> *And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. <sup>16</sup> He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

<sup>17</sup> *And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”*

<sup>19</sup> *So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. <sup>20</sup> And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Last Thursday was Ascension day and it occurs forty days after Easter. We have just heard the narrative of Ascension day’s wonderful event.

<sup>5</sup> *God has gone up with a shout, The LORD with the sound of a trumpet. <sup>6</sup> Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! <sup>7</sup> For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding.<sup>1</sup>*

In this way David rejoiced in the Old Testament when God had manifested to him that the Saviour would ascend into heaven and sit at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

But is Christ's ascension into heaven really an occasion for rejoicing? Did He not thereby depart from us? Did He not leave this earth and withdraw from us His presence so that we see Him no more?

He certainly did in a certain sense absent Himself by His ascension into heaven. Still, we can and must rejoice with David; for though Christ is absent in a certain sense, still, in another, in a higher and more important sense He is present with us, and that presence was brought about by His ascension.

Let us consider with the help of God's Holy Spirit, that *Christ Is Absent And Yet Present*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. In What Sense Jesus Is Absent From Us

First, then, in what sense is Christ absent? We read, "<sup>19</sup> *So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.*"

And in Acts 1:9 we read that *while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight*. So our Lord was taken up into heaven and seen no more. After His ascension into heaven He was no more exposed to the view of men. And that is the true nature of His absence.

By His ascension Jesus permanently changed the body of His resurrection into an invisible body. Occasionally He did the same thing before this. When after His resurrection He showed Himself to His disciples, He would suddenly appear in their midst, and then again vanish and disappear before their eyes.

But now He slowly disappeared before them in such manner as to convince them that from this time on they would see Him no more, that from now on He would no more show Himself visibly on this earth. His disciples would no more know Him after the flesh.

The Lord did not ascend in the manner commonly accepted. He did not ascend into heaven in such manner as to go up higher and higher, until He appeared to be a small speck in the blue sky, a speck that grew so small that it could not be discerned by the sharpest eye.

No, Jesus only went up to a certain height where He was plainly seen by the gazing disciples from below, and then a cloud came, and He was enveloped in that cloud and seen no more. He had passed from the visible into the invisible.

And “*sat down at the right hand of God,*” as our Gospel says. Jesus Christ, we know, is God and Man in one person. Now the divine part of Jesus Christ could certainly not be seated at the right hand of God in His ascension. According to His divine nature He had been with God from everlasting.

It was according to His human nature that Jesus sat at the right hand of God. And what does this mean? It means, that according to His human nature the glorified Christ assumed the full and constant exercise of universal dominion, rule, and government over heaven and earth and all creatures, and especially over His church on earth.

How, then, are we to look upon Christ since He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty? Did Christ remove from this earth His human body and take away from us that same body which was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, descended into hell, and on the third day rose again from the dead?

Did He take that body away into the unlimited space above us? Did Christ in that body go so far away from us into the skies that now it is beyond the stars and the largest telescope cannot reach Him?

Is there a certain place there, where God, like an earthly monarch, has a gilded throne upon which He is sitting, with Jesus Christ, His Son, sitting at His right side? Is the body of Christ as far away from us as the heavens are away from the earth?

No, God is a spirit. He is everywhere. He cannot be confined to a certain spot. And did not Christ Himself say immediately before His ascension, “*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*”?

It is true, the earthly manifestation of Jesus Christ our Lord, closed on the Mount of Olives. In a certain sense Christ is absent from us since the day of His ascension. That gracious countenance of our Lord is no more seen by mortal eye, that thrilling voice is no more heard. But what is it that is really absent of Christ? Is it His body?

No, it is merely His visible presence; for He was taken away in a cloud; it is merely His lowliness, His form of a servant, for He is exalted and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, that is to Him is given all power in heaven and upon earth.

He is withdrawn from out of actual sight, and will remain so until that great day when He shall return and come from heaven in a cloud with power and great glory to judge the living and the dead.

## **2. In What Sense Jesus Is Present With Us.**

In the first place we must guard against the Calvinistic theory of Christ's spiritual presence. It is claimed that since His ascension into heaven Christ is present only spiritually, that only the divine part of Christ is present with us, but not His human part.

They claim that He is present only inasmuch as our thoughts are occupied with Him, and we believe in Him, and spiritually deal with Him in our minds while we feel and experience His gracious divine presence with us when He fills our souls with peace, comfort, and joy.

This theory is wrong. It makes two Christs out of one, while there is but one God, and one Mediator between God and man.

According to this theory of Christ's spiritual presence there must be one Christ far away from us, above the stars, the human Christ; and another Christ who is with us and everywhere, the divine Christ.

According to this theory the two natures of Christ, His divine and His human nature, which are inseparably united in Christ's person, and like body and soul constitute and form the one Christ, they are torn apart so that there is no God-Man Jesus Christ, but a man, or a human nature, which is in heaven, and a God, or a divine nature, which is upon earth, making actually two persons.

No, there is but one Christ, one person, and as little as the body of a living man can be at a certain place and his soul a thousand miles away, so little can Christ's human body be disconnected and separated from His divinity.

Where His divine nature is there must be His human nature. Though Christ ascended into heaven, yet He is present with us, present not only spiritually but also bodily.

This is the very reason why we must rejoice over Christ's ascension. Had Christ withdrawn from us Himself, even His own body, what comfort would there be in His ascension? What benefit could we derive from it?

All we could do would be to mourn over His departure as we mourn over the departure of those whom we love. But this is the true comfort and benefit of His ascension, that He no more confines His bodily presence to a certain locality, to a certain land or place, but that He is present everywhere, invisibly, but really and bodily present in heaven above and on earth below.

It was His ascension that brought this about, exalting His human nature, endowing His human nature with divine glory and majesty, so that the man Jesus is just as eternal, almighty, omnipresent, omniscient, as is the God Jesus.

But although Christ is bodily present everywhere, being crowned Lord of all, to get the benefit of His presence we must seek Him in His Word and in His sacraments.

We must know that we are lost and condemned sinners and that we cannot be saved in any other way but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us poor lost and condemned sinners. We must have Christ and make Him our own that we might live. Christ is present in His Word with His saving grace.

For this is what we read in our Gospel, ***“<sup>14</sup> Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.***

***<sup>15</sup> And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. <sup>16</sup> He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”***

Here Christ institutes the office of the holy ministry to have His Gospel preached in all lands, and He promises to save all who believe the Gospel. Christ Himself is present where His Word is being preached, invisibly present, and through the Word He offers unto all who hear the preaching of His Gospel the treasures of His grace: forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

In the early times of the Christian church Christ also gave certain signs to those who believed. Jesus said to His disciples, ***“<sup>17</sup> And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with***

*new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”*

Christ promised these signs to His church. They are rarely witnessed among Christians in our days, because there is no general necessity for them. It was different with the apostles. They had to break down the ramparts of heathenism. They had to introduce the Christian religion in the world. And for this reason their preaching was supported by miracles.

*“They went out,”* as we read at the end of our Gospel, *“and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.”*

Not only with His Word, the Gospel, is Christ bodily present and working with those who preach the Gospel. He is also present in His sacraments.

Christ says, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved.”* When a person is being baptised Jesus is invisibly present, blesses that person, and works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation.

And it is the same thing with the other sacrament, the Lord’s Supper. There the Lord is bodily present. In, with, and under the bread and wine He gives us His true body and blood as a token that our sins are forgiven.

It is not a spiritual eating and drinking of Christ’s body and blood, and the bread and wine is not merely a sign or emblem to remind us of the body He gave for us and the blood He shed for us, but with it is connected His real, true body and blood, mysteriously connected with the bread and wine; and it is by a sacramental, incomprehensible eating and drinking that we receive the body and blood of our Lord.

Thus we have seen, my friends, although absent in a certain sense, namely inasmuch as we do not see Him, Christ is not absent from us, strictly speaking. He is present. He became even more present by His ascension than He had been before. And to this day He is making true His promise, *“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”*<sup>2</sup> Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 47:5-7

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:20