

# Ascension

It was on Maundy Thursday in the upper room where Jesus said, "*In a little while you will not see me.*"

It was six weeks later on a Thursday when He ascended out of sight. We have been here before. You can imagine the feeling of the disciples. Loneliness. Fear. and Sadness.

Jesus triumphed over the grave. He rose from the dead. That should have been the beginning of something huge! After all, how many new missionaries can claim to have arisen from the dead? What a great foundation for evangelism! But Jesus doesn't seize the moment. Nobody's out knocking on doors or holding public meetings or revivals. In fact, other than the soldiers at the tomb, I'm unaware of any unbelievers that Jesus appeared before.

So here we are six weeks after Easter and we're still a little band of believers. But now, Jesus adds insult to injury and takes away our greatest comfort, and our greatest resource--His visible body with nailprints in His hands.

I know that the Gospel tells us that the Apostles went to the temple rejoicing.

But I also know that sorrow and joy are a mixed bag.

Let's try to work things through together. Follow with me here.

Who is this who ascends into heaven? Is it not God Himself, incarnate of Mary?

This is most certainly true. Jesus is the One who created the heavens and earth.

And isn't it true that God is good and that everything He does is good?

This, also, is most certainly true. Jesus even told us so ahead of time.

*"If I do not [go to the Father] [the Comforter] will not come to you. But, if I go I will send Him to you."*

So He ascends in order to give you something more--SomeONE more.

So, did Jesus' ascension give us something or take something away?

You can make a good, rational argument that He ascended to give us something.

And you would be right.

But you can also rightly say that His ascension took something away.

And this, too, would be right.

In fact, this follows the pattern of the entire Christian life.

And it is here that we wish to dwell for a time.

Jesus always takes away in order to give. He kills in order to make alive.

And this is true not only in terms of taking away evil and replacing it with good.

Often times, He takes away what is good and gives something better.

After all, you certainly couldn't argue that Jesus' visible, resurrected body was a bad thing to have around.

Likewise, in the First Article of the Creed, we extoll all of creation as good.

"Clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle and all that I have." These are all good gifts from a good creator.

And yet, Jesus regularly takes them away.

Hunger, cold, loneliness, poverty are all indicators that Jesus takes away clothing, food and home.

Perhaps the greatest pain is caused when He takes away spouse or children.

There is no denying this pain... No whitewashing the sadness.

And it would be flat out wrong to say that these were evils that needed to be taken away--just as it would be nonsense to say that Jesus' visible presence was evil.

But still they are gone and God is responsible for it.

So what are we to say? Did God make a mistake? Did He forget you?

By no means! Rather, He takes away something good to give something better.

We might have thought that the Church would be greatly benefitted by having a visible head to show off the holes in His hands and feet occasionally.

He would be the only Church-leader in the world who was crucified and raised.

He would also be the oldest and longest serving of all Church leaders.

What a benefit that would be in times of schism to be able to dispense with all the wrangling over Bible interpretations and simply go straight to the source.

Jesus' resurrected body would cause untold growth and keep us unified.

But Jesus had other plans. And if we believe He is God, we will also believe that they are better. That He always takes away good to give better.

This pattern actually goes to the heart of the Christian life.

It is exhibited daily in the life of repentance and forgiveness.

In repentance, you of course give up the evil--but you also give up some good!

You lose some of your standing or reputation before children, or spouse or friends.

You will lose some of your strength and power and this can reduce your ability to serve others. There are many good reasons to deny your sin and carry on.

But as you are unwilling to repent, you will never know the joy of forgiveness.

And so, Satan would have you not repent--and use these arguments for it.

Keep what you have and be poorer for it.

But as you repent before God and one another, you will be living in Christ.

Losing the good to gain the better. Dying to self in order to live in Christ.

And this is all possible--and only possible because Jesus withdrew His visible presence in order to give you something more.

Now He is truly present not only in one place at a time but wherever two or three are gathered in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Now the One who shares our human nature sits on the very throne of God.

Now the Holy Spirit has come to cause you to believe this Holy Word and lead godly lives according to it.

And in this great exchange of the good to the better, Jesus has founded His Church on earth--the body of Christ--where forgiveness reigns in all.

*"Therefore, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell [it] unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* Matthew 18:15-19 **AMEN**