

Sermon followed by Service

May 12, 2024 – Ascension

Ephesians 1:18-2:10

Doesn't it feel great? Great with a deep sense of relief. Great to be able to say: "I've got a guy for that"? When your dvd player is running louder than your car, what a relief to be able to say: "I've got a guy for that." When your car is shedding rust, and worse, what a relief to be able to say: "I've got a guy for that." When your house is falling apart, the garage door won't open, the toilet won't stop, what a relief to be able to say: "I've got a guy for that." I could go on - I am so blessed! Let me just say this: What a relief to be able to say: "I've got a guy for that."

Who is your "guy"? What do you tell others about "your guy"?

Are you the guy for anybody else? What would it take for you to be "the guy" for somebody else?

Now, what about when you look into the mirror and you see: "what a mess, what a wreck, what happened? what do I do?" What about when you look into the mirror and you see: "what a mess, what a jerk, why can't I ever get it right?" What about when you look into the faces of the people close to you, you see their hurt, you see their trouble, and you wonder: "How can I ever do what they need? How can I ever be whom they need?" What about when you look into the faces of the people close to you, and you remember what you said, what you did, what you failed to do, and you wonder: "What are they thinking? What are they going to do? Can I ever fix this? Or am I just going to make things worse?" What about when you look out at the world around you, and you see one thing after another going wrong; worse, you see the world turning wrong and against you?

What about when your life feels like a living hell and you look up to God and you remember your slips, the times you fell short; you look up to God and remember the times you ran with the world without God; you look up to God and you remember the times you listened to Satan instead of listening to God; you remember the times you obeyed your cravings instead of obeying God; you look up to God and you can't dare to hope, you can't dare to pray; you look up to God and all you can imagine is death and judgment. What about those times, all those times? I've got a guy for that. You've got a guy for that.

And what did he do? He put himself in your place. He put himself in your place in this world, and he put himself in your place before God. He put himself in your place, not just as someone who might have slipped or tripped before God, but he put himself in your place before God as the one who treated his family and friends wrong; he put himself in your place before God as the one who ran with the world instead of walking with God; he put himself in your place as the one who listened to Satan instead of listening to God; he put himself in your place as the one who obeyed his cravings instead of obeying God. He put himself in your place in this world and was treated horribly wrong, and even though he lived right in every way, he put himself in your place before God as someone who got it wrong in every way. Isn't it amazing? Even though he is the Son of God, your guy put himself in your place as a son of wrath.

And so your guy knows what it's like to look up to God and see nothing but death and judgment - **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!”** That's what your guy went through on the cross to pay for your sin, my sin, the sin of that whole wide world out there. But that's not all. Your guy knows what it's like to stick with his Father - **our Father who art in heaven**. He knows what it's like to stick with the him - **“Not my will, but your will be done. ... Father,**

into your hands I commit my spirit" - and he knows what it's like to have God come through for him and for you.

Yes, your guy knows what it's like to have the world go wrong and turn wrong against him - "**Crucify, crucify**" - and he knows what it is like to come out on top. Your guy knows what it is like to be in your place, because in so many ways he was in your place, experiencing the worst of this world. But today your guy is in God's place, seated at God's right hand in heaven.

And what's he doing? Your guy isn't just watching and waiting. Watching and waiting to see what we'll do, watching and waiting to see what happens to us. No, he's not just watching and waiting. With all the power of God, your guy is ruling over everything for you, his church, as if you are as near and dear to him as himself, because as his Church, you are part of himself.

In our lesson, what are some of the ways Paul shows your connection to Jesus? Who is always working that connection?

It wasn't always that way, was it? Paul has us look back in the mirror. "**But as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.**" Not just slipping and tripping into sin, but walking about in the ways of the world, walking about in the ways of Satan, walking about with a spirit of disobedience. Paul has us look back in the mirror, but he doesn't leave himself out, and he doesn't blame the world or Satan, but he sees himself working the cravings of his sinful flesh. He doesn't deny; he doesn't excuse; he doesn't try to make his sin seem small - he includes himself: "**Like all the others, we were by nature objects of God's wrath.**"

Then we have one of those most beautiful words from God. “But.” Not, “but because you were so good or so cute,” or “but because you tried,” or “but because I just knew you would turn out good.” No, not because of anything in us, but because God is rich in mercy, because of God’s great love with which he loved us. **“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.”**

And what did God do in his great love, in his mercy and grace? He Jesused us! God raised us up with Jesus. He seated us at his right hand with Jesus. In the chapter 1 part of our lesson, God raised your guy Jesus to life on Easter, and with his Ascension into heaven, he seated your guy Jesus at his right hand. In the chapter 2 part of our lesson, God raised us up with Jesus; he seated us at his right hand with Jesus.

Instead of dead in sin, you are now alive in Christ! Instead of walking and wandering in the kingdom of Satan, you are seated on God’s right hand with Jesus. It might not look like we are seated with Christ in heaven; it might not feel that way; we might not always live that way. But God is so sure about what he has done for you in Jesus, he is so sure about your guy Jesus has done for you and so sure about what your guy Jesus will do for you, that he already sees you sitting with Jesus in heaven.

Paul says that I am already seated with Jesus at God’s right hand, but in so many ways that doesn’t match my experience. So what’s the answer?

In what other places does Scripture proclaim our future existence with the past tense?

I wish I could see that now; I wish I could feel that now. I wish I felt like I was sitting with Jesus in heaven right now. But God has something better for me, better for us. **“We are God’s craftsmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** Instead of looking in our mirrors and thinking “eeyou,” instead of looking back on our days and thinking “Why can’t I get things right?” instead of looking at ourselves as messes, you get to see yourself as God’s craftsmanship, his craft-work, God’s masterpiece of art, created in Christ Jesus. Instead of looking at your day as another day of trouble in you and around you, you get to see your day as a day specially prepared by God filled with good things - good works to do specially prepared by God. Instead of looking out at the world as the kingdom of Satan, instead of heading out into the world to walk about in the kingdom of Satan (with delight or dread), you get to see the world as God’s world - how? - specially set up with good works specially prepared by God for you to walk about in. Not just as a spectator - “oh, that would be nice if I could do that.” No, you get to walk through life as if life is a giant garden or buffet or bakery shop of good things to do specially prepared by God for you - “I’ll try one of these, and those, and those. And then coming back for more - “I’d love to do more of this good thing and more of that good thing.” We get to go through life never running out of the good that God has prepared for us to do - as his special masterpiece created in Christ - for what? - so you can be somebody’s guy or gal doing good with Jesus.

When you hear God has prepared good things for you, what comes to mind?

When you hear God has prepared good works for you, what comes to mind?

Which gives you more joy?

How? How can we be doing good for God? I know a guy. You know a guy. God has a guy he raised to life and seated at his right hand in heaven. And now, you are raised with your guy. You are seated with your guy. You are created in him - to be the guy, to be the gal, doing good with him! Amen.

What are some of the good works which God has prepared for you to do this week?

DIVINE SERVICE II

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we seek connections to give us a better life; we seek connections that make us look better, feel better, and give us a better hope for the future.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we see we already have the connection that gives us a better life. Today we observe The Festival of Christ's Ascension - and see our connection with Christ!

OPENING HYMN

"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"

Hymn 472 vs. 1-4

A hymn of glory let us sing! New songs throughout the world shall ring:
Alleluia, alleluia! Christ, by a road before untrod,
ascends unto the throne of God. Alleluia, alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

The holy apostolic band upon the Mount of Olives stand,
Alleluia, alleluia! and with his followers they see
their Lord ascend in majesty. Alleluia, alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

To them the shining angels cry, "Why stand and gaze upon the sky?"
Alleluia, alleluia! "This is the Savior," thus they say.
"This is his glorious triumph day." Alleluia, alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

"You see him now, ascending high up to the portals of the sky."
Alleluia, alleluia! "Hereafter Jesus you shall see
returning in great majesty." Alleluia, alleluia!
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

ASCENSION DAY DIALOGUE

Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights above.

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts. *Psalm 148*

How majestic is the Lord's name in all the earth!

He has set his glory above the heavens. *Psalm 8*

For the Lord is the Most High over all the earth.

He is exalted far above all gods. *Psalm 97*

God has ascended amid shouts of joy,
the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets.

God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. *Psalm 47*

The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble.

He sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake. *Psalm 99*

The throne of our God will last forever and ever.

A scepter of justice will be the scepter of his kingdom. *Psalm 45*

Praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted.

His splendor is above the earth and the heavens. *Psalm 148*

HYMN

"A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing"

Hymn 472 vs. 5-6

Be now our joy on earth, O Lord, and be our future great reward.

Alleluia, alleluia! Then, throned with you forever, we
shall praise your name eternally. Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

O risen Christ, ascended Lord, all praise to you let earth accord.

Alleluia, alleluia! You are, while endless ages run,
with Father and with Spirit one. Alleluia, alleluia!

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord Jesus, King of glory, on this day you ascended far above the heavens, and at God's right hand you rule the nations. Leave us not alone, we pray, but grant us the Spirit of truth that, at your command and by your power, we may be your witnesses in all the world; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Acts 1:1–11

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They 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."

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

HYMN*“Crown Him with Many Crowns”***Hymn 511 vs. 1 & 4**

Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne;
hark how the heav’nly anthem drowns all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless King thro’ all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of heav’n, enthroned in worlds above;
crown him the King to whom is giv’n the wondrous name of Love.
Crown him with many crowns as thrones before him fall;
crown him, ye kings, with many crowns for he is King of all.

SECOND READING*Ephesians 1:18–23; 2:1–10*

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Luke 24:44–53

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

“On Christ’s Ascension I Now Build”

Hymn 476

On Christ’s ascension I now build the hope of my ascension.
This hope alone has always stilled all doubt and apprehension,
for where the head is, there as well I know his members are to dwell
when Christ shall come and call them.

Since Christ returned to claim his throne, great gifts for me obtaining,
my heart will rest in him alone, no other rest remaining,
for where my treasure went before, there all my thoughts will ever soar
to still their deepest yearning.

O grant, dear Lord, this grace to me, recalling your ascension,
that I may serve you faithfully, in thanks for my redemption;
and then, when all my days will cease, let me depart in joy and peace
in answer to my pleading.

SERMON

Ephesians 2:1-10

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



EXAMINATION (SATURDAY)

RITE OF CONFIRMATION (SUNDAY)

CONFIRMAND

Noah Alan John Lofsness

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

M: Gracious Father, you have adopted our brother in Baptism and anointed him with your Holy Spirit. Renew and strengthen him by that same Spirit so that he may continue to grow in faith and boldly confess you before others. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Move him to faithfully hear your holy Word and joyfully receive your sacrament that he may again and again be assured of your gracious love and forgiveness. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Give him the sincere desire to die each day to sin and put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Protect him from the powers of evil and give him the weapons to fight against the devil. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Keep him faithful and holy, so that he may inherit eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen.

HYMN

"Gracious Savior, Gentle Shepherd"

Hymn 757

Gracious Savior, gentle Shepherd, children all are dear to you;
may your loving arms enfold them in your care their whole life through.
By your tending and protecting keep them safe in all they do.

Tender Shepherd, never leave them, never let them go astray;
by your warning love directed, may they walk the narrow way.
Thus direct them, thus defend them lest they fall an easy prey.

By your holy Word instruct them, fill their minds with heav'nly light;
by your pow'rful grace convince them always to approve what's right.
Let them feel your yoke is easy, let them find your burden light.

Taught to love the holy praises which on earth your children sing,
with their lips and hearts, sincerely, glad thank-off'rings may they bring,
then with all the saints in glory join to praise their Lord and King.

MOTHER'S DAY (RESPONSIVE)

Brief intercessory prayers may be added at the end of the prayer.

Eternal God, in the beauty of Eden you created a man and a woman and brought them together in marriage. You enabled them to be fruitful and increase in number and so you established the family. Help us to see in your creating wisdom your love for parents and children.

Move us to be thankful for mothers and fathers and for all the blessings you bring to our homes.

Today we remember the mothers who loved us even before we were born, who endured childbirth, and who cared for us when we could not care for ourselves. On this day and on other days cause us to recall the hours they spent and the sacrifices they made so that we could be content and carefree as we grew up.

Lead us to express our thanks and return the love our mothers showed to us.

We cannot thank you enough for mothers and fathers, too, who brought us to Holy Baptism, taught us simple prayers at mealtime, and read us Bible stories at bedtime. Forgive us for resenting their correction and ignoring their guidance as they desired to keep us on the narrow path of life with Christ.

Never let us forget the Christian training they gave to us.

We remember with compassion the mothers who were not always able to reflect your love in our lives. Help us understand the pressures they carried and the sadness they experienced. Take away unhappy memories and rid us of resentment.

Lead us to forgive them as you have forgiven us.

We confess our failures to hold our parents in love. For the naughtiness of childhood, the flare-ups of youth, the overconfidence of adulthood, and for all the words and actions spoken in haste and to hurt, we ask you and our parents for pardon.

Give us courage to make up for past sins when we can.

As their minds and bodies age, help us to support our parents as well as we can. Give us patience to accept their struggles for independence and strength to deal with their weaknesses. Enable us to keep them mindful of Jesus and his promises of a perfect life in heaven.

As they brought us to your Word, so lead us to keep them close to your Word.

Keep in your care all the mothers of our world. Comfort mothers who have been separated from their children. Give strength to mothers who care for children who are sick or troubled. Encourage mothers in societies where mothering is disrespected or discouraged. We pray especially for those who long to be mothers but have not been so blessed.

We pray you to preserve and protect the blessed task of motherhood.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer.

So many women have influenced our lives. Lead us to think about their wisdom, compassion, patience, and encouragement and give us opportunities to say thank you when we can. Help us imitate their care for us as we work and play with children and young adults.

Strengthen us to love others as Jesus loved us. Amen.

PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

M: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

"Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise"

Hymn 474

Hail the day that sees him rise to his throne above the skies!
Christ, the Lamb for sinners giv'n, reascends his native heav'n.

There the glorious triumph waits; lift your heads, eternal gates!
He has conquered death and sin; take the King of glory in!

See, the heav'n its Lord receives, yet he loves the earth he leaves;
though returning to his throne, still he calls the world his own.

See, he lifts his hands above; see, he shows the prints of love.
Hark! His gracious lips bestow blessings on his Church below.

Still for us he intercedes, his atoning death he pleads.
He, the first of all our race, near himself prepares a place.

There we shall with him remain, partners in his endless reign,
there his face unclouded see, live with him eternally.

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Before making any major changes to the compensation code, the committee will survey congregations and other calling bodies to determine how actual compensation compares to the synod code.

The SC reviewed the summary of FY24 financial results, noting that total unrestricted support is trending better than planned, while overall expenses are trending lower than planned through the first nine months of FY24. FY24 special funds reserves through March 2024 increased to \$92.7 million, a \$10 million increase from FY23, and a \$50.0 million increase in the last five years, more than doubling special funds reserve balances.

The SC approved the support forecast for the next biennium (an estimate of the financial support that will be available to fund the synod's ministry). It's estimated that synod support levels will be \$35.3 million in FY26 and \$36.4 million in FY27. The SC also approved the initial planning assumptions, including:

- Congregation Mission Offerings projected to increase 0.5% each year,
- called and non-called worker wages to increase on average 3.5% in FY26 and 2.0% in FY27,
- healthcare expenses to increase 10% each year,
- no increase in retirement plan expenses in either year, and
- operational/program expenses and school subsidy to increase 3.0% each year.

The SC discussed the continued progress that the WELS CFO, Mr. Kyle Egan, has been making in helping to improve the process for planning, organizing, and prioritizing capital projects for the synod. His office has started to have conversations with firms that could assist with comprehensive site-planning across all synod locations and will work with the SC Executive Committee with the goal of getting that process started in the next few months.

The SC received reports from Home Missions, World Missions, Ministerial Education, WELS Christian Aid and Relief, and Congregational Services. Mr. Steve Hansen, Mr. Kenneth Gosch, and Mr. Thomas Schermerhorn all completed 12 years of faithful service on the SC. We thank them for all that they have done.

Serving with you in Christ,
WELS President Mark Schroeder

WELS SYNODICAL COUNCIL SPRING 2024 MEETING

The Synodical Council (SC) held its spring meeting on April 26-27.

In my president's report, I noted that:

- Synod finances remain strong, with another year of record Congregation Mission Offerings and special fund balances all at a healthy status.
- The newly established Capital Projects Fund will provide planning support for needed building projects at the synodical schools and will potentially provide support for servicing capital debt if needed.
- Two missionaries have been redeployed from Thailand to Australia. WELS World Missions will also be working with a new Chinese congregation in New Zealand.
- A special committee is working on plans to celebrate the synod's 175th anniversary in 2025.

Rev. Paul Prange provided an update on the work being done by the Ministry Recruitment Task Force. The task force will provide detailed information to the district conventions this summer.

Rev. Jonathan Hein presented an overview of the draft of the synod's new long-range plan, which is entitled "Christ through us."

Several new office spaces will be created in the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry, providing offices to administrators who need them.

The Administration Committee received reports from the synod's subsidiaries (WELS Foundation, WELS Church Extension Fund, WELS Investment Funds, Northwestern Publishing House) and from various synodical departments (Human Resources, Technology, Communications, Ministry of Christian Giving, WELS Benefit Plans). Appointments to various board positions were approved by the SC.

The committee also received a report from the Compensation Review Committee, which reminds congregations that paying "synod code" includes full health insurance premiums, cash housing allowance, cost of living increases, and reimbursement for the self-employment aspect of social security.

(Continues on previous page.)