

#1777  
Cf. #1068 #1209

Ephesians 4:7-16<sup>1</sup>  
7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
*Exaudi*<sup>2</sup>

Christ ascended into heaven  
and gave gifts to his Church.  
Supplementary Lectionary Series "B," Epistles

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Grace WELS Durand MI  
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Mother's Day

WHEN JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN ...  
I. HE GAVE FREEDOM TO CAPTIVES  
II. HE GAVE PROCLAIMERS OF HIS WORD  
III. HE GAVE UNITY TO HIS CHURCH

In the Name of Jesus who suffered, died, was buried, arose and ascended into heaven to the right hand of God, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

The Ascension of Jesus into heaven occurred forty days after his resurrection from the dead (cf. Acts 1:3&9). The anniversary of this event took place last Thursday, when we had an informal worship service here at 4:00 p.m. In that service a number of Scripture Lessons were read, which pertain to Jesus' resurrection from the dead and his ascension into heaven. One of those Scripture Lessons is the one before us this morning – the Sermon Text, Ephesians 4:7-16:

**<sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace has been given according to the measure of the free gift of Christ. <sup>8</sup> This is why it says:**

***"When he ascended on high,  
he led captivity captive  
and gave gifts to men"***

(cf. Psalm 68:18).

**<sup>9</sup> (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> It was he who gave some to be Apostles; some to be Prophets; some to be Evangelists; and some to be Pastors and Teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people [i.e., the**

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<sup>1</sup> *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> The Seventh and Last Sunday after Easter, also the Sunday after Ascension (last Thursday), is traditionally called *Exaudi*. We pray that the LORD would hear the prayers of his people who cry to him for help and deliverance. Jesus' Ascension assures us that we too shall ascend into heaven with him on the last day and be with him there forever..

**saints] for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> 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.**

**<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> 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.**

Jesus' ascension into heaven to the right hand of God, assures believers that he is their Redeemer; that he rules, guides, controls and directs all things for the benefit of his Church – that is, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Fellowship of All Believers in Jesus – and that there is in heaven a place for all believers which Jesus has prepared for them. In addition, our text mentions some of the other benefits believers receive as a result of Jesus' ascension into heaven. These serve as “talking points” – a popular political phrase these days in the political arena. WHEN JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN ... I. HE GAVE FREEDOM TO CAPTIVES; II. HE GAVE PROCLAIMERS OF HIS WORD; and, III. HE GAVE UNITY TO HIS CHURCH.

WHEN JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN ...  
I. HE GAVE FREEDOM TO CAPTIVES

St. Paul writes,

**<sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace has been given according to the measure of the free gift of Christ. <sup>8</sup> This is why it says:**

**“When he ascended on high,  
he led captivity captive  
and gave gifts to men”**

(cf. Psalm 68:18) (4:7,8).

The New International Version (NIV) translation says that Christ “led captives in his train.” The King James Version translation and the Greek state that Christ “led captivity captive.” So, who or what did Jesus take captive and lead away as captives? The writer to the Hebrews helps us understand that about which St. Paul is speaking.

The writer to the Hebrews states,

**<sup>14</sup> Since the children have flesh and blood, [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— <sup>15</sup> and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death** (Hebrews 2:14&15).

By his death on the cross, Jesus destroyed the one who had the power of death, that is, the devil. All people throughout their lives are in slavery – captivity – by their fear of death. You yourself may have had such a fearful, near-death experience.

Perhaps you have been involved in a near car crash or even a real car crash. Your heart beats faster, your blood pressure rises, your adrenaline pumps. Why? You have an innate fear of death. Those who have been in the military probably have had similar fearful experiences. So one of the things that holds people captive – no matter how brave they may be – is death – the fear of dying. The writer to the Hebrews states that the devil “had the power of death” and therefore held all people captive. Two of the things then that hold people captive are the devil and death.

We can add other aspects of this captivity of mankind by this summary: That which holds mankind captive are sin, death and the grave, hell, and the devil and his power. Jesus took captive all of these by his death – his death on the cross.

Jesus became man in order to take into captivity all of these aspects of mankind’s captivity. St. Paul wrote to the Philippians,

<sup>5</sup> **... Christ Jesus:**

<sup>6</sup> **Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God  
something to be grasped,**

<sup>7</sup> **but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.**

<sup>8</sup> **And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—**

**even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5b-8).**

Since no mere man could ever redeem the life and soul of another (cf. Psalm 49:7-9), Christ Jesus, true God from eternity, became true man, born of the virgin Mary (cf. John 1:1-5,10-14; Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25). Our text summarizes this fact when it says,

<sup>9</sup> **(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill all things) (4:9&10).**

This Jesus descended to this earth, took on human nature and redeemed mankind. Jesus, the God-man, was crucified, died, buried, arose from the dead, and is now ascended – it was this Jesus who took captivity captive.

Jesus took captivity captive. Jesus took captive sin, death and the grave, hell and the devil and his power. How did Jesus do this?

Jesus took sin captive by committing no sin. Peter writes that Jesus “committed no sin” (1 Peter 2:22a; cf. Isaiah 53:9). The writer to the Hebrews states that Jesus was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15b).

Jesus took captive death and the grave by arising from death and the grave on the third day – Easter Sunday morning (cf. Matthew 16:21; 20:17-19; Luke 24:46; John 10:11,14,17&18; etc.).

Jesus took captive hell. Jesus’ descent into hell was not, as some have supposed – was not part of his suffering. Jesus’ suffering for the sins of the world was complete when he proclaimed from the cross, “It is finished!” and breathed his last (John 19:30). Rather, Jesus’ descent into hell was a victory march, a victory parade, by which Jesus announced that hell and all its hordes of demons and the damned had been defeated (Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:18-20a).

Jesus took captive the devil and his power. Once again, the writer to the Hebrews said that Jesus destroyed “him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14b). The Apostle John adds in his First Epistle, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8b).

Jesus took captive all of these: Sin, death, the grave, hell, the devil, and the devil’s power. Jesus took captivity captive. Jesus did this for you.

#### APPROPRIATION

Do you think perhaps that you are not by nature captive to sin, death and the grave, to hell and to the devil and his power? Regarding sin, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (John 8:34b). Being a slave to sin means to be a captive of sin. Since we daily sin much, all of us by nature are captives of sin.

Regarding death, the writer to the Hebrews states, “Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes said, “Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other” (Ecclesiastes 3:19a). Along with death comes the grave – “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust” (cf. Genesis 3:19; 18:27b; Job 7:21b; Psalm 30:9; 44:25; 90:3; Ecclesiastes 3:20; etc.).

Regarding hell – that is where you and I should be because of our sins. The LORD proclaimed through Ezekiel, “the soul who sins is the one who will die” (Ezekiel 18:4b). The death of

the soul is death in the torment of hell, “where their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched” (cf. Isaiah 66:24b; Mark 9:43-48; Revelation 20:10,13-15).

Moreover, you and I, because of our sinfulness, are under the devil and his power. Once again, John states in his First Epistle, “He who does what is sinful is of the devil” (1 John 3:8a).

There you are; there I am. All of us are by nature captive to sin, death and the grave; captive to hell and to the devil and his power. But ...

But ... Jesus took captivity captive. “Since that is the case,” you ask, “why are we still subject to these captivities?” You and I still have to deal with these capturers because the time has not yet come for the fulfillment of all things. “Why,” you may ask, “did Jesus not bring me to faith – perhaps as a baby through Holy Baptism – and then take my life, so that I could immediately be in heaven?” Jesus has done this for some. Jesus has not done this for you and me.

Jesus has left you and me here on this earth at this time for a reason. This brings us to our second “talking point” – again, the “political phrase.”

## WHEN JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN ... II. HE GAVE PROCLAIMERS OF HIS WORD

Our text begins with the words, “But to each one of us grace has been given according to the measure of the free gift of Christ” (4:7). Jesus gives gifts of grace to each and every believer. Our text mentions some of these “gifts” in particular. St. Paul says, “It was he [Jesus] who gave some to be Apostles; some to be Prophets; some to be Evangelists; and some to be Pastors and Teachers” (4:11). These are gifts of God’s grace in Jesus to his Church – to believers.

We usually think of “Apostles” as those who had direct contact with Jesus. We think of “Prophets” – who worked in both Old and New Testament times – as those who proclaimed God’s Word and often pointed to future events. We think of “Evangelists” as those who either studied under one of the Apostles or simply proclaimed the Word of God to others. The last grouping to which St. Paul points is “Pastors and Teachers.” Because of the Greek grammatical construction in this text, St. Paul is saying: “Pastors, that is, Teachers,” for one of the things pastors do is teach – teach God’s Word. (That does not mean that there was no separate category for “Teachers.” 1 Corinthians 12:29 mentions this category separately.) What can be said to be true of all believers in these categories is that they are, basically, proclaimers of God’s Word.

St. Paul, writing to Timothy, speaks about the general responsibility of proclaiming God’s Word. He says to Timothy,

**<sup>2</sup> Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. <sup>4</sup> They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:2-4).**

St. Paul is telling Timothy to proclaim God's Word in truth and purity. Sometimes this proclamation will be to "correct" some misunderstanding, like the one I mentioned before – the idea that Jesus' descent into hell was part of his suffering – no, Jesus' descent into hell was a victory march. Sometimes this proclamation of God's Word will be to "rebuke" – rebuke someone who has become entrapped in a sin and is not repentant. Sometimes this proclamation of God's Word will be to "encourage" – encourage faith in Jesus through the proclamation of the Gospel, and the bringing forth of fruits of faith in good works. Contrary to all of this, St. Paul warned Timothy how many people will "gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 4:3b). Paul says the same thing in our text.

As apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors – that is, teachers – proclaim God's Word in truth and purity, false doctrine and those who espouse it, will be exposed and put down. St. Paul says that when God's Word is truthfully proclaimed, "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" (4:14). This is what happens when people are not thoroughly grounded in God's Word in truth and purity. This is what happens when people are not thoroughly anchored by faith in Christ Jesus alone. They are like infants floating on the troubled sea, tossed to and fro. They become susceptible to "the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (4:14c). But this is conquered by taking to heart the proclamation of God's Word in truth and purity. What people need – what all of us need – is God's Word spoken in love – love for our souls.

Paul says, "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (4:15). The "truth" – that again, is God's Word in truth and purity, without addition, without subtraction, without twisting or distorting (cf. Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18,19; Jude 4; Mark 7:9-13; etc.). And, this "truth" of God's Word is to be spoken "in love."

Love is that which has as its highest objective that which is best for the person being loved. Sometimes that will involve "tough love" – a phrase often applied to raising children. Sometimes love involves xxx's and ooo's (hugs and kisses). Always such love includes the proclaiming and proper application of God's Word. Such "love" is an appropriate topic for our observation of "Mother's Day."

It is a temptation for parents – mothers included – to look the other way when their children misbehave – even adult children, when they go astray in sin, lifestyle, or fall away from worship and God’s Word. To look the other way is not love. Rather real and true love will “correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2b).

There is another “talking point” – “political jargon” – in all of this proclaiming of God’s Word. While Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, calls apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors – that is, teachers – he also calls all believers to testify concerning him.

#### APPLICATION

Jesus has called you to do this too. This is why God has left you here on this earth at this time. Jesus says to you through the Apostle Peter, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). Think of it, if God had taken you to heaven when you were brought to faith in Jesus through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments, then there would be no children for you to bring to Holy Baptism and no one to teach the little ones in infancy concerning their Savior. If God had taken you to heaven, then there would be no opportunity for you to speak about Jesus to your Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances and Neighbors. God left you here on this earth to function in some way in his Kingdom of Grace on this earth. That function will include the four “t’s” God has given you: Time, talent, treasure and testimony.

Your time is not your own (cf. Psalm 31:15). God has determined for you the time you will spend on this earth. You are to use that time God has given you for his Kingdom.

Your talent is not your own. God has given you certain talents – gifts of his grace – some of which you may not be aware as you take advantage of opportunities to cultivate and discover those talents. Use them in God’s Kingdom.

Your treasure, wealth, money, possessions are not your own. Moses warned Israel, “You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:17,18a). In addition, God told Israel through the Prophet Haggai, “‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty” (Haggai 2:8). That was no less true for Old Testament Israel as it is for you. Use the treasure, wealth, money and possessions God, which has given you for his Kingdom.

The testimony you give, the words you say, are not your own – it is not about you! God gives you opportunities to tell others about Jesus. On this Mother’s Day, mothers, be awake, alert and aware of the opportunities God is giving you to proclaim his Word to your offspring.

So, what's the big deal? Why does God want all of your time, talent, treasure and testimony?  
This brings us to the third – “political jargon” – “talking point”:

WHEN JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN ...  
III. HE GAVE UNITY TO HIS CHURCH

St. Paul writes,

***<sup>11</sup> It was he [Christ Jesus] who gave some to be Apostles; some to be Prophets; some to be Evangelists; and some to be Pastors and Teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people [i.e., the saints] for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> 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 (4:11-13).***

Using the time, talent, treasure, and the testimony of God's Word, the Holy Spirit builds up, nurtures and strengthens Christ's Church – that is, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Fellowship of All Believers in Jesus alone. That unity of faith comes only through God's Word. St. Paul spoke to the Corinthians about this very thing.

The Corinthians were plagued by disunity and factions. Paul wrote to them,

***<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers, in the Name of our LORD Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. <sup>11</sup> My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas" [that is, Peter]; still another, "I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:10-12).***

Sometimes that disunity plagues our congregation of Grace Lutheran Church, Durand, Michigan. Some might contribute to that disunity by bragging about pastors Maas, Kell, Schultz, Clemons or Krause. Paul had the answer for these kinds of divisions among the Corinthians. He said, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:13). Putting that truth into our context, we could ask: Did Pastor Maas save you? Did Pastor Kell redeem you? Did Pastor Schultz give his life for you? Did Pastor Clemons sacrifice his life for you? Did Pastors Krause and Kunde pour out their blood for you? The answer is obvious. No!

What is God emphasizing through St. Paul here? Paul answers, “We all [are to] 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” (4:13). “We will in all things grow up into Christ

who is the Head” (cf. 4:15b). “From him the whole body is jointed and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (4:16). How is such unity of faith in Christ achieved? Only by God’s Word in truth and purity.

#### APPLICATION

Because of our sinful nature, unity of faith is jeopardized by disagreements and discord among members. Often such disagreements are about things that do not really matter. Should we put the carpet in the narthex now? What about the east roof and eventually the entire roof? Should all the fans be turned on or only some of them? Should the fans run clockwise or counter-clockwise? These issues we need to keep in perspective. These issues will not be here after Judgment Day. But keep the unity of faith.

Paul said to the Corinthians and he says to us: “I appeal to you, brothers, in the Name of our LORD Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Such unity comes only as we hear, learn, read, mark, and inwardly digest God’s Word in truth and purity. Never let it go. Never compromise it. Hold to it alone.

#### CONCLUSION

Jesus’ ascension into heaven assures us that he is our Redeemer; that there is in heaven a place prepared for us; and that Jesus himself is controlling all things for our benefit – the benefit of his Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Fellowship of All Believers in him. Jesus’ ascension assures us that he has taken captivity captive; sin, death and the grave, hell and the devil and his power, no longer have rule over us. We have been redeemed – bought back from all of these capturers by the precious blood of Christ. Redemption – forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation are ours by faith in Jesus – faith worked in us by God’s Word in truth and purity.

You and I then, as believers in Jesus, are to use the gifts he has given to us for the work of his Kingdom. We are especially to tell others – Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances and Neighbors – about Jesus our Savior and their Savior. Through this Word of God, the Holy Spirit will build up and nurture the Church and give unity – unity through the Word of God in truth and purity. Amen.