

The Valley Evangel

Serving the members and friends of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Scottsdale, Arizona

May 2018

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From the Pastor's Desk

On Thursday, May 10, we will observe the festival of the Ascension of Our Lord with a Divine Service at 7 p.m. The events that will be commemorated on this occasion are recorded in Luke 24:50-53:

“And [Jesus] led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God” (ESV).

Forty days had passed from the day of Christ’s resurrection, during which time he had appeared to his disciples many times, breaking bread with them and teaching them about the kingdom of God. After the crucifixion of their Lord the disciples had been absolutely miserable, full of fear and doubt. They felt terribly alone, confused, hopeless. When Jesus had then come back to them from the dead as the resurrected Savior, they were filled with profound joy. And that joy was deepened and enriched during the forty days of instruction and fellowship that the disciples experienced with their Lord. Now, however, in his ascension, Jesus is, as St. Luke recounts, “parted from them,” and “carried up into heaven.” He is taken up out of their sight. No longer will their ears hear the familiar chords of his gentle voice. No longer will they feel his manly but warm embraces.

If the disciples were discouraged and grieved on the occasion of their Lord’s death, it seems that they would be similarly discouraged and grieved on this occasion. After the most unspeakable sadness, they had been so overjoyed to have him with them once again. But now, he has been taken up from them, and for the remainder of their earthly lives they will see him no more. This would surely be an occasion for sadness, wouldn’t it?

Like the disciples after the time of their Lord's ascension, we also don't see or hear Jesus with our physical eyes or ears. He is not bodily present among us either. Sometimes, though, in our human weakness and sinful frailty, we may deeply yearn for that kind of presence and for that kind of contact with Christ. We read in the Gospels about the way it used to be with the disciples, as they walked and talked with Christ, listened to him preach, and heard him pray. And we imagine that this kind of encounter with Jesus, in the flesh, would be the key to overcoming our doubts and fears, if it were only possible.

When our relationship with God is challenged by a trial of some sort, or by a guilty conscience, we might have the idea that our faltering faith would perhaps be strengthened by the physical presence of Christ, so that we could be assured with his own voice that he is still watching over us, and that all of our sins are forgiven. Otherwise, without that kind of tangible proof that Jesus is real, we might not be so sure that we can bring ourselves to believe those things. We might have the idea that the disciples who knew Jesus during his earthly ministry were protected from doubts and uncertainties in a way that we are not. And we might also have the idea that when Jesus ascended into heaven, so that the disciples would no longer have the kind of access to him they had previously had, that they would have felt just as lonely, sad, and discouraged as we sometimes feel.

But is that the way they felt? No, it was not. Instead of sadness and grief, St. Luke describes a different reaction to the Lord's ascension on the part of the disciples. He says: "And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God." Not only were they joyful, but they were filled with great joy. Not only were they not grieving, or asking God to comfort them as in a time of sadness, but they were continually in the temple blessing God, praising him for his wonderful mercy and love. Why? What did they know by faith that we might not always realize? Well, it was this: The ascension of Christ to the right hand of the Divine Majesty does not mean that Jesus is now gone, or absent from us. It means instead that he is more intimately present with us than ever before, and that he is intimately present with all his people all over the world all the time.

Jesus had said to his disciples, as recorded in St. Matthew: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." What does it mean when Jesus says that "I am with you always"? St. Paul tells us what it means in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where he explains that Jesus has "ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things."

In the time of his humiliation, during his earthly ministry, Jesus appeared and was bodily present in one place at a time, as is the case with all other human beings. Being found as a man he humbled himself, and took on the form of a servant, as the Epistle to the Philippians tells us. During this time he did not make full and regular use of his divine powers. But now, in his ascended glory, Christ as God and man "fills all things."

God is everywhere. The right hand of God is, accordingly, everywhere. And therefore Christ, seated at the right hand of God, is everywhere. So, when he ascended into heaven, this didn't mean that he was no longer present with his disciples. It means that he was now present with them in a different way. He was no longer physically and visibly present, but he was still with them, with a promise that he would never depart.

Jesus now fills all things. And if he fills all things, that means he also fills the little part of the world where I live, where I struggle, where I think about the meaning of my life and about my relationship with God. If he is everywhere, then he is right here where I am, wherever "here" is. That's what the disciples knew, and that's why "they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God." And that's why we too can be filled with great joy, and bless God in the midst of our trials, fears, and doubts. Jesus is not gone. He is not far away. He is instead intimately close to you, permeating every nook and cranny of your life.

When our pastor faithfully speaks the word of Christ, in his name and by his authority, Christ is there, speaking these things to us. When we are fed with the body and blood of our Savior, Christ is there, most vividly, uniting himself to us and forgiving us. Christ can be and is with us, to help us, to protect us, and

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to encourage us, wherever in the world we may be. We can be comforted by his presence whenever we reflect on the promises of his Word.

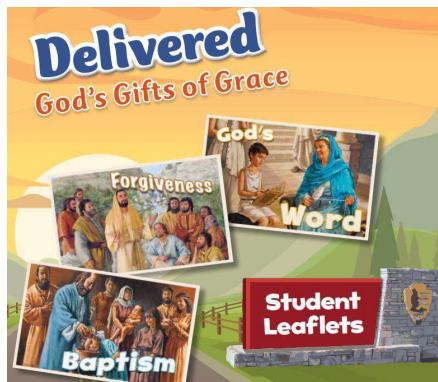
Jesus is simultaneously with everyone who calls upon his name, as they all call upon him. Therefore I can say with confidence that Jesus is with you, whoever you are, even if your faith is very weak. And he will be with you always, as you abide in his Word and as his Word abides in you. He is with you in your moments of fear and uncertainty. He shares those moments with you, and he carries you through them. His ascension does not mean that he is farther away than ever, but it means that he is closer than ever. And he is with us in such a way that he is equally close to you and all other Christians all over the world. Whatever trials you may face, because of our Lord's ascension, you will never face them alone. Wherever your earthly travels may take you, because of our Lord's ascension, you will never go there alone. "And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God." Amen.

– Pastor Webber

Friday Bible Study

The Friday morning Bible Study will go on hiatus after the May 25 meeting, until September 7.

Summer Sunday School



Summer Sunday School begins on May 27. Our theme will be "Delivered: God's Gifts of Grace." Over the course of fourteen weeks pupils will explore New Testament stories that help us better understand God's Means of Grace, the Word and Sacraments. They will learn how, through the Gospel, Holy Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper, our Triune God gives us His incredible gifts of salvation, faith, forgiveness, eternal life, and the strength to live as His people. Every Sunday will also feature a "connection destination": a particular U.S. national park, monument, or historic landmark, connected to the theme of the Bible story. We welcome helpers in the classroom. Please feel free to sit in and assist with activities.

Alpha Center Update

Many thanks to all the Redeemer Lutheran members who brought diapers, clothes, blankets, toiletries and even strollers for our March diaper drive. I took two SUV-full loads to the Alpha Center in March. They were delighted to receive the gifts and assured me they would be put to good use. In the first quarter of 2018 they served nearly 200 clients. For a facility that is open only two days a week this is encouraging!

In their preparation for the next season, they have identified that they are short on boys' clothing sizes 12 months to 5T, and shoes for boys and girls of all sizes. If you or someone you know have some "surplus" of these items in good condition, or if you can find them on sale and purchase them, please

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consider donating. In addition, clients have asked for catechism books. If you have some Bible history books or Lutheran catechisms that are not being used any more, they would gladly accept those as well. I will continue to monitor the Alpha table in the fellowship hall and will take donations from Redeemer members to the center at least once per month.

Lastly, the Alpha Center needs another Board Member to fill a vacant seat. They are looking for volunteers, or nominations of elder-qualified men, with a heart for the unborn, to serve. If you are interested or want to suggest someone, Pastor Webber or I can put you in touch Kay Retberg, the Director of the Alpha Center.

– Jennifer Price, Alpha Center Ambassador/Liaison

Online Videos

One of the webpages within the Redeemer website provides links to online videos that may be of interest to the members and friends of the congregation. Perhaps during the hot Arizona months – which will soon be upon us! – you are inclined to find inside activities and recreations, rather than activities and recreations that require you to go outside and endure the searing temperatures of our desert climate. If this is the case, take a look at this “Videos” webpage and see if anything catches your fancy for viewing in the air-condition comfort of your computer room. The movies and programs that have been included on this page were chosen for their devotional, inspirational, and educational value. They include full-length feature films, documentaries, and shorter pieces; dramatizations of Biblical narratives, historical and biographical subjects, and apologetics. You can get there by clicking the “Videos” box in the left panel of the Redeemer homepage, or you can go directly to that page by typing in this URL:

redeemerscottsdale.angelfire.com/videos.html

Amazon Smile

The Amazon online retailing website has a special program called “Smile,” through which qualifying purchases on Amazon result in donations being made by Amazon to recognized charities, in the amount of .5% of the purchase price. Our congregation is registered with Amazon as such a charity. And so, if and when you do any shopping on the Amazon website, you may be able to help our congregation financially by becoming a participant in their “Smile” program.

Begin by logging into Amazon through this special URL: smile.amazon.com. Then, designate Redeemer Lutheran Church, Scottsdale, AZ, as your chosen charity. (You need to do this only once.) A dedicated link to locate our church within Amazon’s listing of recognized charities is: smile.amazon.com/ch/86-0804217. After that, whenever you go onto the Amazon website, just make sure that you log in through the special “Smile” URL (smile.amazon.com) rather than through the ordinary URL (www.amazon.com), before making your purchases, and your qualifying purchases will automatically result in a donation being made to Redeemer.

We are not advocating that you shop through Amazon rather than through some other online or neighborhood retailer. But if you shop through Amazon anyway, you might as well do it in a way that helps your church!



Devotion: The Christian Life of Change



May is a month of change. The weather starts to warm up, the grass turns green, the leaves return, and signs of life return as the last signs of winter disappear. May also brings a close to another school year as students pack their bags and head home for the summer.

Big changes that occur throughout our lives, whether they are the ending of a school year, a change in career, or even the addition of a family member, these things cause us to look back as well as ahead. This is an important

thing for us to do in our lives as Christians as well. Paul writes to the Corinthians and says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

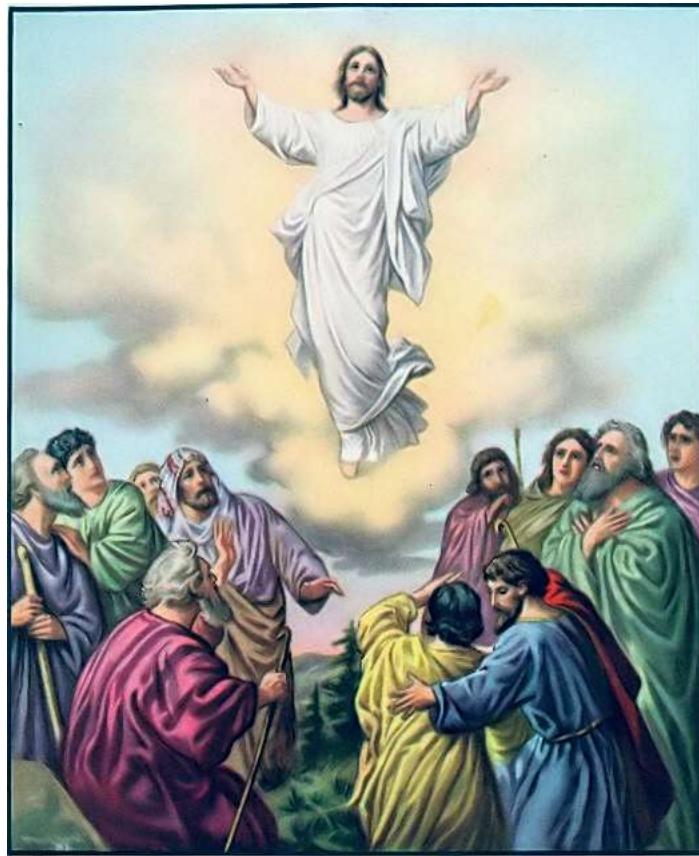
As Christians, we look back and see our sin. We see all our actions that have caused sadness or hurt in our lives or in the lives of those we love. But through the blessing of the Gospel, we also look back at the good news of our Savior, who took our sin upon Himself to redeem us. We see that someone has paid for every evil deed we've done and given us the credit for His perfect life. When faith is created within our heart, our old sinful nature is drowned and buried with Christ. What rises up then is the new creation, made to serve our Lord. What a change this is within us! We look ahead with a clean slate, a clear conscience knowing that God sees us as innocent since we wear the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We look ahead to ways we can serve Him out of love and thankfulness for the grace and mercy He has shown us.

Change can be scary. It is leaving the comfort of the familiar for the opportunity of the unknown. In all things, Christ is our rock and our foundation. Through all the changes and uncertainty that this life throws our way, we know that God has given us something that will never change- His perfect, Holy Word. We rest in His promises knowing that He will guide us

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and protect us whatever may come our way, and that He will work through every situation to bring us closer to Him. What a blessing it is to be able to bring this message of peace and joy to a world that needs it so desperately! How blessed we are to stand on such a firm foundation upon which we build our lives. May God, through His Word and Sacrament, continue to strengthen us in our faith and joy as we look back at how He has kept His promises, and as we look ahead to His continued faithfulness!

From the ELS Board for Home Outreach



*Join us for the
Ascension Day Divine Service:
Thursday, May 10,
at 7 pm*

Redeemer Lutheran Church of Scottsdale

May 2018 Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Sat.
		1	2	3 7pm Internet Study Group	4 10 am Bible Study at the Muth residence	5
6 Easter 6 9am DS 10:30am SS/AC	7	8	9	10 Ascension Day 7 pm DS Internet Study Group canceled	11 10 am Bible Study at the Muth residence	12
13 Easter 7 9am SW w/Spoken Communion 10:30am SS/AC	14 7 pm Church Council at the Church	15	16	17 7 pm Internet Study Group	18 10 am Bible Study at the Muth residence	19
20 Pentecost 9am DS Ladies Guild after the service 10:30am SS/AC	21	22	23	24 7 pm Internet Study Group	25 10 am Bible Study at the Muth residence	26
27 Trinity 9am DS 10:30am SS/AC	28	29	30	31 7 pm Internet Study Group		

Abbreviations:

DS—Divine Service; SW—Service of the Word; SS/AC—Sunday School/Adult Bible Class

Divine Service—Full Word and Sacrament Service with Communion, usually on 1st, 3rd and 5th Sundays, and on major festivals

Service of the Word—A brief spoken order of Holy Communion follows the public service usually on the 2nd and 4th Sundays

Refreshments are served after the Sunday morning Services.

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Redeemer Lutheran Church**
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First Class Mail

About Redeemer Lutheran Church

Our mission is faithfully to preach the Word of God, both Law and Gospel, in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; correctly to administer the Holy Sacraments for the forgiveness of sins; and to reach out to those who have not yet come to faith in Christ Jesus.



We're on the Internet!
redeemerscottsdale.org

Audio recordings of Pastor Webber's sermons, and of entire services, are posted each week on the church website.