



Small Group Study Guide for May 16, 2021

Our Savior Lutheran Church and School

Theme: The Book of Acts relates that after our Lord Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples at various times across a period of some forty days. Now, the disciples look on as Jesus was lifted up until a cloud hid Him from their sight. Thus began the Church's long wait. Generation after generation arise in the Church and still the people of Christ wait. Jesus sits enthroned at the Father's right hand, filling all things with Himself and waiting with us for the Father to signal the moment of His joyous appearing. It is true that He has withdrawn His visible presence from us, but He is nevertheless truly with His Church to the end of the age. Hidden beneath His Means of Grace, He still comes to us. His Ascension did not take Him far; rather, it brought heaven near. "Behold, I am with you always."

Getting Started:

1. A blessed Feast of the Ascension to you all! While the Ascension seems to be becoming a forgotten Feast Day, it is at least as important as the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. There are three LCMS parishes in my home city; every Ascension Thursday they gather for a Divine Service. Do you have any memories from past Ascension Days?
2. When you read or hear about the Ascension of Christ Jesus, how do you picture that scene?

In the Word: Acts 1:1-11. Please read through this section of the text.

3. The author of the Book of Acts addresses the writing to Theophilus. While we do not know exactly who that was, what can be assumed from the name is that he was most likely a Roman citizen holding a high official position. Do you remember who wrote Acts? Hint: It was one of the Gospel writers!
4. Jesus has been with the disciples for around three years now, He has performed many miracles, He has been crucified and risen from the dead—the disciples have become witnesses of numerous incredible things! Right before the Ascension, in verse six, what are the disciples *still* preoccupied with?
5. Now that He is about to ascend, Jesus promises to send to the disciples the Holy Spirit. When was that promise fulfilled? Also, when did *you* receive the Holy Spirit?

6. Jesus ascends into heaven in verse nine. Now, we know that heaven is not simply spatially *up*. We can't get into a rocket ship and eventually arrive at heaven! It's important for us to remember that Jesus ascended, was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of the sight of the disciples. Why would that be something important for us to remember? (Stumped? Have individuals look up: Exodus 13:17-22; Exodus 19:18-19; Exodus 24:12-18; 1 Kings 8:1-11; Matthew 17:1-8; and Revelation 1:4-7. Share what you read.)

Putting it Together

7. In our reading from Acts, we find the disciples standing on the mountaintop looking into the sky, even though Jesus is no longer there! The sermon emphasized the point that we often go through the temptation to look for God in places that He has not promised to be. Examples that were used were: nature and feelings. Can you think of any other places people look for God where He has not promised to be? Additionally, how does it feel to search for something (especially God) and NOT be able to find it (Him)?
8. A dangerous temptation is to think that because Christ Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, God is far and distant from us. However, nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus has promised to be with us always. Jesus has promised to be present with us (primarily in the Church through His Word) as believers gather, in Holy Baptism, in the Lord's Supper. How can we make use of such gifts for the Holy Spirit to sustain and strengthen our faith?
9. But how is it possible for Jesus to be present in those places when He has ascended to the right hand? **Think and discuss first before proceeding.**
 - a. Warning: short theological deep dive. To answer this, we need to have a solid understanding of the Humiliation of Christ. Many think that the Humiliation of Christ was that He become fully human and took on our flesh. How wrong indeed! The true Humiliation of Christ is that He limited the use of His Divine Power. The Ascension is the coronation of Jesus! It marks Jesus' entering into the fullness of the state of exaltation! His self-imposed limitation is no more. He can be truly present wherever He wants to be.
 - b. Thinking about ALL of that (apologies for the mass of information) can you see why the Ascension is such an important day? How can we talk about it with others and invite others to come and hear about this next Ascension Day?
10. The sermon made use of a great quote from Lutheran theologian, A. C. Piepkorn, "The Church is the arena in which God establishes contact with humanity." How is that reality a great comfort for us?

Prayer: Almighty God, as Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.