

Ephesians 1:16-23

Every year - 40 days after Easter - we celebrate the **ascension** of our Lord Jesus into heaven. It was a day of great **sadness** for Jesus' disciples. But since we have the privilege of looking **back** in time on the event, Ascension Day is a day which brings **us** great **comfort**. In today's sermon text, the Apostle Paul is really only trying to make **one** point - as much as we already **know** about Jesus, we can always learn a little bit **more**. And so, that point has become the **theme** for our sermon today: **Knowing Christ Fully**. Paul wrote, *"I keep praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, will give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowing Christ fully."* The Ephesians already **knew** Christ, but Paul wanted them to know Him even **better**. That could only happen through the working of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus had promised to **send** to His disciples. But, before **that** could happen, Jesus Himself would have to **leave** the scene. He said, *"Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."* And that brings us to the **ascension** of our Lord Jesus into heaven - the event which we are celebrating today. Jesus ascended into heaven in order to make it **possible** for us to **Know Him Fully**.

In reality, God is **beyond** our total comprehension, but that **doesn't** mean that we shouldn't try to learn everything we **can** know and understand about our Savior. Such human knowledge has **simple** beginnings. A young child will express his faith and knowledge about God by singing, *"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."* Peter would have called that *"pure spiritual milk"* - just a **taste** of the spiritual knowledge which is yet to come - so that even the **newborn** in the faith can **taste**, and **see** that the LORD is **good**.

As time goes on, our spiritual diet **changes**, and we are weaned from **milk** to **semi-solid** foods. In other words, we continue to learn **more** about Jesus. An example of **that** would be the way we confess our faith in the words of the **Apostles' Creed**: *"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."* This confession is much more **complete** and **specific** than the words of the song Jesus Loves Me.

As we approach the age of **confirmation**, we even learn **explanations** for the

articles of the Apostles' Creed. The study of those explanations is really our first sampling of strong spiritual **meat**. It's **here** that we acquire an even **more complete** knowledge of our Savior: *"I believe that Jesus Christ, true **God** begotten of the Father from all eternity, and also true **Man** born of the virgin Mary, is my **Lord**. He has **redeemed** me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all **sin**, from **death**, and from the power of the **devil**, not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious **blood**, and with His innocent **sufferings** and **death**. All this He did that I should be His own and **live** under Him in His kingdom, and **serve** Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and rules eternally."* This process of moving from Jesus Loves Me to **deeper** and more **complex** theology, is precisely the kind of **growth in faith** which Paul prayed for the **Ephesians** to experience. But **why**? Paul wrote, *"I pray that the eyes of your **heart** may be **enlightened**, so that you may know the **hope** to which he has called you, just how **rich** his glorious inheritance among the saints is, and just how surpassingly great his **power** is for us who believe."*

God wants us to **Know Christ Fully**, so that our hearts will be **enlightened**; and we can have **hope**, **riches**, and **power**. But it doesn't **always** work that way. Sometimes we are like little **children** - children who give in to our earthly **fears** - and in the process, we **rob** ourselves of the **joy** which truly belongs to us. We see those **other** Christians who seem to have all the **hope**, and all the **riches**, and all the **power**. We **envy** them, as if somehow God has blessed **them**, and **ignored** us.

At **other** times we are like little children who know a **little** about God, but our knowledge isn't very **complete**. We **all** have at least a **little** knowledge about God. We **know** that Jesus **loves** us - that He loved us enough to **die** for us, and to **forgive** all our sins. So we know **enough** to get us to **heaven**. But what about our lives here on the **earth**? Many times children are **frustrated** by the fact that they don't have **enough** knowledge. They don't know how to do the things their older brothers and sisters are doing - they don't know how to do the things their parents and grand-parents are doing - they aren't **old enough** for those things (which really says, they don't have enough **experience** or **knowledge**). Jesus' **disciples** were like that. They **knew** about His **birth**, and His **childhood**, and His public **ministry**. They **knew** about His miracles and His acts of **kindness**. They even **knew** about His death and resurrection. Yet, at the time of Jesus' **ascension** they asked, *"Lord, is this the time when you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* Their **knowledge** was still **incomplete** - and as a result, they were still **frustrated** and **confused**.

So, Jesus promised to send them the **Advocate** - the **Holy Spirit** - in order that they would be able to **Know Christ Fully**. Jesus has made the **same** promise to **us**.

He will send us His Holy Spirit every time we make use of God's **Word** and the **Sacraments**. God would **love** to bring **more** hope, and riches, and power into our lives, if only we will **plug in** to that promise - by **reading** and **studying** His Word in our church and in our homes, in our worship services and in our Bible classes. Get **in** on it. Although we are still limited from **gathering together** the way we normally would, don't hesitate to make use of all the opportunities which the Holy Spirit **still gives** us to **worship** our Lord and Savior - opportunities to **hear** and **study** His Word - opportunities to **receive** His Sacrament - opportunities to learn to **trust** God's guidance in our lives - opportunities to **Know Christ Better** than we know Him right now.

In the end, we won't **earn** anything by our actions. It won't change our standing with **God** at all - it won't make God **love** us any more than He already does - because we already **know** that **Jesus** has done **everything** which was required to bring us into eternal life in heaven. But learning to **Know Christ Fully** will still bring us **lots** of good things. We can have the **joy of growing** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ - we can have the **joy of sharing** our generous **offerings** for His work here on the earth - we can have the **comfort of knowing** that our sins are all **forgiven** as we receive the Lord's Supper - we can experience the **power of encouraging** our fellow believers as we **sing**, and **pray**, and **worship** our Savior and our God. No matter how much we **already** know about Jesus, we can still learn to **Know Christ Better**.

Have the recent events in our world made us **afraid**, or **confused**, or **frustrated** with life? **God's Word** has the answers for us. As we continue to worship our God in a **virtual gathering** each week to hear His **Word**, and as we come together as **individuals** and in **small groups** to receive His **Sacrament**, the Holy Spirit will show us how Jesus has already **overcome** all our problems, setting us **free** to **Know Christ Fully**, and to gladly, willingly, and gratefully **serve** Him with our lives. Amen.