



Seventh Sunday of Easter
1 June 2025

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Well my friends, we are back from a weekend of Synod Assembly. The one weekend of the year where the 114 congregations of the Greater Milwaukee Synod gather for worship and business – such as it is. By constitution, pastors are required to be present. At our annual meeting each year, you appoint two others to attend on your behalf. Though I have never been a part of a congregation with people begging to be appointed to go to Synod Assembly. This year our President Scott Greger and 1st Vice-President Sarah Paczesny attended, along with Pastor Edwin and me. Pastor Tony somehow scheduled himself to run a marathon in North Dakota to get out of attending Synod Assembly. It is a difficult decision. If you are in-between - hearing reports, voting on budgets, listening to one person too many argue the pros and cons of multiple resolutions that are, most often, irrelevant to anyone outside the little world that is the ELCA and 26.2 miles of sweat and strain to the finish line, which do you choose? Ask Pastor Tony next Sunday which is the better choice.

Nevertheless, Ascension was well represented – Pastor Edwin and Sarah Wehmeier presented at the El Salvador Table; Klelin Saravia Quintanilla, our 2nd Vice President, presented at the Spanish Table (representing the 5 congregations of the synod with Spanish speaking members); Jeremy Poling, Dave and Jaime Dringenburg shared their gifts of music in the worship band on Friday night; Addison Jahner, Janina Cruz, and Anna Marien all assisted in worship as readers, communion assistants, and with prayers and Lisa Wunder provided support for all of the worship clean-up along with every other Ascension member I could find after worship. Of course, it is good to gather as the congregations of the synod, I would only prefer that our time be centered in worship, glorious worship, and preaching, and less focused on spoken reports and debates that most often amount to little. Two weeks ago, I preached on the theme, “what we do as church matters.” I believe that with all my heart – just maybe not in the context of much of the debate at synod assembly. Okay. Enough.

Today, we celebrate the seventh and final Sunday of Easter. Just days ago, we marked the day of Ascension. The words we speak in the Apostles’ Creed are not just words, a confidence of our faith – “On the third day he rose again and ascended into heaven.” For the early church it was a retelling of the event the disciples witnessed with their own eyes. A friend traveling in Germany this past Thursday sent me a text message. What is going on today? The entire country of Germany is shut down for something called “the Ascension.” I told him he should have listened more when he was a member at Ascension and then explained to him what the day was commemorating.

Pastor Jacqueline Schmitt writes...The early Christians clearly appreciated the Ascension and called this day the crown of all Christian feasts. St. Augustine said this festival confirms the grace of all the festivals of the church together, for without the Ascension, the reality of every festival would perish. Unless the savior had ascended into heaven, his nativity would have come to nothing and his passion would have born no fruit for us, and his most holy resurrection would have been worthless. So where does that leave us? The risen Christ has ascended to the right hand of God, but the Spirit has not yet descended upon us. Following the Easter story, we read that Jesus has gone; the group of Twelve is missing a member; and Peter steps forward to lead the “early church” in one of its first administrative decisions. The world is not the same for any of them either. And although in our church calendar the ascension has already taken place...the reading from John takes us back once again to a time before the crucifixion in the upper room at the Last Supper. We hear, Jesus, praying for us; he prays that we might be embraced by God’s protective love as we continue life in this world. Jesus knew its challenges, its disappointments, even its hostility. We may not be happy with certain aspects of this world, but this is where we are, and this is what we have. At times we may feel betrayed by church or political leaders, and we may be disappointed by those with whom we are in community, but we have not been betrayed by, nor will we be disappointed with God. We live “in between” the world we knew and loved and the one that is yet to



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appear, but we are not alone. We have a God who loves us, a redeemer who prays for us, and we also have one another.

At the head table in the cafeteria, one of the nuns had placed a big bowl of bright red, fresh, juicy apples. Beside the bowl, she placed a note which read: "TAKE ONLY ONE. REMEMBER, GOD IS WATCHING." At the other end of the table was a bowl full of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, still warm from the oven. Beside the bowl was a little note scrawled in a child's handwriting which read: "Take all you want. God is watching the apples!!!"

Today we stand between the apples and the chocolate chip cookies – in between the power of the ascension moment and the power of the gifting of the Holy Spirit to earth. But we have been here before. This in between time – when you have said goodbye to a loved one as they are wheeled off to surgery and you are escorted to a waiting room; when the groom waits at the altar and the bride has yet to appear in the doorway; when the last exam is submitted and the professor takes too long to enter the grade; when the job interview is over and HR drags their feet in reply; when the sermon has come to its natural end and the pastor begins another story; when a member of your faith community is detained and we wait for word of their release; when there are words spoken in anger but the grace of the apology takes longer than you would hope. We know this in between time and in this time, between apples and chocolate chip cookies, we have a God who loves us, a redeemer who prays for us, and we also have one another.

The joy is that we are only in this in-between time for a little while. The challenge is not rushing off before the Holy Spirit comes to our aid. Sometimes it is difficult for us to wait for that which is sweeter. Sometimes we choose to take that which is right in front of us - however poor the substitute - because it is there and we do not want to wait any longer. When more often than not, if we allow God to work and place our hope and our confidence in God—the sweetness of life lived in the Spirit may be closer than we think. Synod Assembly or 26.2 miles. Worship or debate. Rushing off or waiting. Apples or Chocolate Chip cookies. The promised presence of the Holy Spirit is ever closer than we can imagine. It always has been. Amen.