

**“that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”**

Happy Ascension Day! As we gather on this lowly day in the Church year, we hear of the lofty heights Christ has soared for you. I think we often misunderstand this day as we think it’s simply the day Jesus went away from the disciples. That’s not the case whatsoever. I think the key is understanding the phrase “the right hand of God.”

In both the Nicene Creed and Apostle’s Creed we confess that Jesus “ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.” The question we ask is “why?” Why does Christ ascend to the Father’s right hand?

3. Does He ascend for the good seat? Paul writes, that the Father **“raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places”** In a plain reading of this, we might think that the right hand of God is a location. The right hand might mean to the right of me. You picture the Father sitting in a throne room and Jesus sitting in the next chair over.

In fact, in the early days of the Lutheran Church other Christians believed just that. The other non-Roman Catholic Christians, called the Reformed, believed that the right hand of God was a place, and since Christ was in heaven, He logically could not be in the bread and wine of communion.

Did Jesus Christ just ascend to heaven so He could get a good seat? Maybe finally get a good view into what’s going on in the remote parts of the world? Get a chance to view the sunrise over the Himalayas or watch a sunset over the Pacific Ocean? No, that’s not it at all!

The right hand in the heavenly places is not a place, it is figurative language to describe something greater. If you describe someone as your right-hand man, it’s not that that guy is always standing right next to you. It means that that man is an indispensable to you. He’s as helpful as your right hand.

In the Bible, the right hand of God is used to denote His power. Psalm 118 reads: **“Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous: “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly, the right hand of the LORD exalts, the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!”**” God’s right hand is not simply a matter of a seating chart or the right spot, it means that at Christ’s ascension, all the power of the Father has been given to the person of Jesus Christ.

The Almighty God is now the Almighty Jesus. He has been exalted **“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name**

**that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,”**

Why does Jesus ascend to the right hand of the Father? It's not for the good seating. We understand the right hand of God to be symbolic for the Father handing over all power to Jesus. Next, we wonder, 2. Does He ascend for the promotion?

I think we all know this kind of person. You know the climbers when you see one. Maybe you had a co-worker like this. Yeah, they're a good worker, but their heart was never in lower management, they're just in the position because it's a steppingstone to vice president. Maybe you see a confident, talented young man playing on the Logger's, but he's really just there to show off when the talent scouts for majors are in the stands. He doesn't want to play for the Loggers, his future reads Milwaukee Brewers or Minnesota Twins.

You're always kind of sick of this guy because you know you're just a means to his ends. Does he really want to get lunch with you, or does he know that you're one phone call away from the company president? Does the star pitcher really like his team, or is he just tolerating them so the Loggers can be one line on his resumé?

Maybe we think that Jesus was somehow self-serving in His Ascension. He was just slumming it with us sinners during His time here on earth, but now the real work has begun that He's back in heaven with the Father. Was humanity just one steppingstone in Jesus' promotion track?

Perhaps this question is even more absurd than the last one. Of course not! We know that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is the pinnacle of history. To mix metaphors a bit, we could say it's the whole ballgame. Then what's the Ascension, is it just the 7<sup>th</sup> inning stretch or leaving the stands once the home team trounced the rivals from out of town?

If Jesus' time on earth was akin to winning the world series, ascension is the start of the party. It's the commissioner presenting the commissioner's trophy to the winning MLB team. And we can celebrate on Ascension day because Jesus won a real prize.

There is a difference between the Son of God before His conception in Mary's womb and after He ascended into heaven after his resurrection. The difference is that He is now human. The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity was always divine, but He wasn't always human. When He ascended into Heaven, everything that belonged to the divine nature of Jesus was awarded to His human nature.

So was it a promotion? Yes and no. No, it was not a promotion because Jesus as God cannot be higher than God Himself. The Trinity exists in perfect unity and shares all things. But yes, it was a promotion in a sense that Jesus "...ascended

far above all the heavens, truly fills all things, and now rules everywhere, from one sea to the other and to the end of the world, not only as God but also as a human being” [FC SD VIII 27].

But what does it mean for us? It’s helpful that the theologians and smart thinkers of the Church examine the deep mysteries of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ, but what does it mean for me? An average, everyday churchgoer? Why does Christ ascend to the Father’s right hand? 1. Does He ascend for your benefit? By all means, yes!

Jesus did not ascend as a self-seeking individual looking for a promotion. He ascended that He may better serve you. At the right hand of God, He has the power and authority to rule over the universe—both in the Church and in Secular world. Paul writes, “**And [the Father] put all things under [Jesus’] feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,**”

As He rules over the Secular world, He guides the leaders, the people, and history itself. He does so with the sympathy and understanding of a human, and the power and wisdom of God. He is a human like us and had the weaknesses and limitations that were part of the human experience. Thus, he knows best how to guide and influence those in our charge, and even knows ways of best humiliating them to make our rulers realize that they aren’t themselves gods.

If the pandemic has brought any good in our society and world, perhaps it would be just that, to teach politicians, doctors, and police officers that they aren’t divine, but their fallibility is all too real as they have often failed to achieve the outcomes in the way they wished. Perhaps that is also something we learned: as much as we thank God for good leaders, we too realize that rulers, doctors, and law enforcement is not god and shouldn’t be treated as such. But luckily for us and those in power, we have someone sitting in a position of power who is both god and man. Jesus Christ.

And Jesus rules over the Church in a fuller way than He did before His Ascension. According to his *human* nature He can be everywhere at once, being bodily present specifically in the bread and wine of communion we of which we are about to partake. According to his *human* nature He can be our great High priest who knows each and every of our individual struggles, and yet intercede for us before the Father with just the right words. According to his *human* nature, He can weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice, and laugh with those who laugh.

**CHRIST ASCENDS TO THE FATHER'S RIGHT HAND IN ORDER TO WORK POWERFULLY IN YOU!** He’s not locked in heaven. He didn’t simply leave us to go to the big leagues. He is ever-present as your brother who has the sympathy to care for you, and the power to fix it. May we always rejoice that we have a God who loves enough to become human just like us, and remain human!