**6/1/25**

**Ascension & Unity**

**Vicar Vince Piekarski**

**John 17:20-26 (NRSVUE)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSVUE) (2) **Amen.**

Welcome and thank you one and all for joining us here today. It is a blessing being able to be in this community of faith and be able to worship together. I again thank you all for your commitment in one way or another to our Rummage Sale yesterday as well. I was ever so thankful to see this community come together and enjoy fellowship time with those who had entered our doors for our annual fundraiser. That is indeed what community is about… welcoming the stranger, the friend, the neighbor, and all we come in contact with.

Now, you know, ever since myself and the other pastors met a few Mondays ago for our Pericope Group, I had a few choices to make for this Sunday. Of course, some of you may very well realize, yet again some of you may not realize, that we are fresh off of the heals of the Ascension of Our Lord this past Thursday, and now we are moving right along to this service we have arrived at today for our Seventh Sunday of Easter. We are marching and living on before we arrive at Pentecost next Sunday. This is an exciting yet confusing time of the church year, and we are called to and reminded to live in it, and not just speed along to the next event or thing on the calendar. We are to live in the time, to awe, to wonder, to explore, and to think; as well as to even be a little confused or perplexed just like the very first disciples. Our faith indeed is about living things out, truly experiencing, learning, and not just moving forward time and time again as Reverend Brooks reminded me of as we were on the phone yesterday afternoon finalizing some plans for our care and compassion being shared in the community later today with food, word, and prayer when we head up to Rio Grande at 2PM. Now she may very well have been looking back and referring to the events and timeline of Holy Week, but that very same example, and that very same process of being present and just living in our faith and in the moment occurs all year round as well.

As a matter of fact, as a child growing up in the Catholic Church, I was expected to be at service during the specific holy day of obligation that occurred this past Thursday. It was one of those times as a young child that I asked my mother or grandmother why we had to go to church in the middle of the week. It was one of those times as I grew older that I got to dawn the altar servers’ robe, and experience and learn more as I helped the Priest preside over service. However, as a Lutheran, I have noticed that these important days kind of get missed or pushed aside on the calendar, and that is not intentionally by any means. It is just the fact that we do not have a lot of extra worship services, and there is nothing wrong with that either. However, it is also not our goal to actually dismiss these days, for these days and these events are vitally important parts of our faith, and the life of Jesus. So, as a Pastor or Vicar we get the choice to pay some special attention to them, and shed some light on them. Yes, we even actually have the option of switching out the readings, music, and other things for this service. However, I realized I was not ready to tackle that change full cycle this year, but nonetheless I knew I could share some about it. What further confirmed the importance of sharing about it was when Bonnie had come up to me during the Rummage Sale being worried that she had not changed the paraments out on the altar and pulpit to fulfill the colors for the special day. I assured her that she did not have to, but I also was very happy that she thought about this and had even brought it up to me in conversation.

Now, if you step back in time with me a little bit, and if you remember last Sunday then you realized that our Gospel Reading had some foreshadowing to this very event. Verse 28 in chapter 14 of John delivered these very words to each of us, “You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.” (2) Jesus spoke specifically of ascending to his father, ascending to heaven, ascending to his rightful place following the very words in scripture. His very work and ministry were complete here on this earth, Jesus had done all that he could, he truly lived and showed us all the way, and He left His special touch and legacy with the disciples who he had taught, empowered, and commissioned to move things forward. Now, even though they would no longer have him by their side they were comforted with the fact that they would not go about spreading the church alone, for they would have the advocate, the paraclete, the Holy Spirit right alongside of and with them, just like you and I do to this very day. We touched on this last week, and I just did not want to leave it in the dust this week. I will consider changing out everything next year and going full circle on this topic and discussion for sure. However, for today, as we close off things here, and transition to the very message and word from scripture we have in our Gospel Reading, let me just share with you the Introduction from that very service outline for the Ascension of Our Lord. We hear or read that “… the risen Christ ascends into heaven and his followers are assured that the Spirit will empower them to be witnesses throughout the earth. The disciples are told to not gaze up into heaven to look for Jesus (Acts 1:11); we find his presence among us as we proclaim the word and share the Easter feast. We too long for the Spirit to enliven our faith and invigorate our mission.” (9) That right there hits the spot, it makes a point oh so specific, and that is to live life here and now and not keep looking up to heaven, or more specifically, waiting for our life hereafter. There is work to do right here and right now, and we have been commissioned to grow the kingdom, to grow the church inside and outside of these walls, just like the very first disciples way back then. So, let’s get to it!

Alright, now we have today’s word, our message, our Gospel Reading and that has us hearing what all too often is referred to as Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer. I mean to think that Jesus would stop all that he is doing and make it so vitally important to pray for the disciples back then, those to come, and those of us here and now and our continued mission means so much. This of course reminds me, as does some other Pastors and Theologians, of instances when our parent may have stopped and prayed for us when we went out to play as children, for us so that we did well in school, for us so that we would be safe while driving, for us so that we would find a significant other, for us so that we would find a calling or career in our lives, and lastly when our parent stopped and prayed in the past because they truly wanted to because they had the utmost concern and love for us. Our parent had this very perfect model, this very perfect example right in front of them, and they followed it for sure. I am quite sure that those of you out there that are parents have followed along the same path, and myself being called and raised up in this very congregation has stopped and followed this very example and prayed for you as my flock, and the flock of Christ.

However, let’s explore things from an alternative mindset here, and let us all really draw on the fact, or pay special attention to Jesus actually not just stopping and praying for, but desiring for all of us to become one in an intimate unity and identity with our Triune God. Now, you may be sitting there and saying or even questioning how can this be. You may be saying that our world is a hot mess and our various faith groups could not be any more divided. You may be saying that there are several unchurched, or even people of no faith out there. You may be saying that in 2025 Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer simply did not, and is not working! As we sit in this gap from Ascension to Pentecost, just like the very disciples did back then, we are called to reflect, and we are called to get to work. We may not all see eye to eye, we may not all have the same theology, we may not all even wear the same clothes; but I assure you that we are not “solitary Christians or spiritual “Lone Rangers” (7) out there in the world. The Lutherans, Catholics, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, Non-Denominationals, Assemblies of God, and so many more are spreading the Good News just like the church did back then. There are several people of no faith, unaware of the faith, or even denying the faith of Christ; but our very actions and living out life as “Little Christs” as Martin Luther put it will show them the alternative. It will show them the very grace and mercy that you and I experience each and every single day and moment of our lives. It is our job together, whether those others may have a different way or a different flavor, or a different approach or different invite, but to focus on spreading the good news. In that effort we are rallying together, we are uniting, we are actually being one in the body of Christ. We are experiencing that very first love shown to us, and we are taking that out there in the world and sharing it with others. This is precisely where I have said time and time again that our faith is individualistic. We are not expected to be some robots and follow one single and solitary path with no conviction and no variance. We are called to love and love on others in the way that we have learned and experienced the faith in our very lives. We are indeed in unity, we are indeed becoming one, we are indeed glorifying our Triune God when we leave these church doors and share a smile, a heartfelt hello, holding a door for one another, and letting the message and all that there is from our hearts flow into the community and the life of others. God loves everyone, he did not just love the ones like himself. We are urged and called to do the very same thing. So, I continually remind and even urge you to go and do and see all that God will do for this church, for this community, and for the kingdom here and now and forever.

Now, let us truly live and not forget that we are in the continued season of Easter. Let our announcement and proclamation ring out just like it did on that Easter Sunday morning as we say together and with one another that Christ is Risen… **He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia****!**

**References & Study Points**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year C 2025

 June 1st, 2025

 Seventh Sunday of Easter

(2) BibleGateway.com

(3) The Four Pages of The Sermon

 Revised and Updated

 A Guide to Biblical Preaching

 Paul Scott Wilson

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 Abingdon Press

(4) WorkingPreacher.org

 Seventh Sunday of Easter

 We may need to rethink what “being one” means in the context of the High Priestly

 Prayer and in our own context

 June 1, 2025

 Commentary on John 17:20-26

 Jennifer Garcia Bashaw

(5) WorkingPreacher.org

 Seventh Sunday of Easter

 John 17 brings us to the end of Jesus’ farewell to his disciples.1

 June 2, 2019

 Commentary on John 17:20-26

 Barbara Lundblad

(6) WorkingPreacher.org

 Seventh Sunday of Easter

 The creative love of God

 May 29, 2022

 Commentary on John 17:20-26

 Meda Stamper

(7) WorkingPreacher.org

 Seventh Sunday of Easter

 This Sunday wears many hats. For some it will be the observance of the Ascension

 of the Lord.

 May 12, 2013

 Commentary on John 17:20-26

 Lucy Lind Hogan

(8) WorkingPreacher.org

 Seventh Sunday of Easter

 On his last night with the disciples, Jesus shares a meal with them, washes their

 feet, gives them a new commandment, and answers question after question

 concerning the fact that he is about to leave them (John 13-16).

 May 16, 2010

 Commentary on John 17:20-26

 Mary Hinkle Shore

(9) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year C 2025

 May 29th, 2025

 Ascension of Our Lord

**John 17:20-26 (NRSVUE)**

 Jesus prays that the life of his followers will be characterized by an intimate unity

 of identity with God. To be so identified with God means also to share in God’s

 mission: to proclaim the word that will bring others into this same unity.

 [Jesus prayed:] 20 “I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those

 who believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one. As you,

 Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may

 believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given

 them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that

 they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent

 me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 Father, I desire that

 those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my

 glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of

 the world.

 25 “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these

 know that you have sent me. 26 I made your name known to them, and I will

 make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them

 and I in them.”