

The Ascension of Our Lord
St. Mark 16:19-20; Ephesians 4:4-16

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

What does it mean, "He...ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things?"

Well, for starters, what you heard in Mark 16:20 begins to answer the question. "And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs." As you heard, this was stated following the Lord's ascent from the disciples eyes. Out of view, Jesus is now bodily present everywhere. Don't ask me how this works; this is simply the truth that is confessed according to the Scriptures and espoused in the Lutheran Confessions. In His bodily omnipresence, Jesus fills all things. I suppose that were He still manifested on earth, it would be more difficult to grasp His omnipresence—you could point to a person and say, "Jesus is there," and the eyes of fallen flesh would or could override what your eyes of flesh "see." Out of sight, you can believe, though not fully understand, that Jesus is everywhere, filling all things.

Before ascending, though, Jesus promotes, as it were, His disciples to apostles. He sends them, though He did tell them to wait until Pentecost, when they would be anointed with power from on high. As His apostles, they went everywhere proclaiming the Gospel, as He directed them—"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." So, it follows:

- Where two or three (or more) are gathered in the name of Christ, Jesus is there. (cf. Matthew 18:20)
- When the Word is proclaimed, Jesus is there.
- When water is applied to someone with the Word, Jesus is there.
- When sins are confessed, Jesus is there.
- When sins are forgiven, Jesus is there.
- When the faith is professed, Jesus is there.
- When the body and blood of Christ are consumed, Jesus is there.

Jesus is there in those things happening, working through and with those things happening—in other words, filling them. And if Jesus is there filling them, then there is forgiveness, life, and salvation there!

Why?

Again, it is as you heard in Mark 16:20, as well as back in verse 16. "And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs." "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Jesus worked with the apostles as they proclaimed the Gospel. His people brought the message of salvation to all the world, and as they proclaimed the Gospel, people believed. As St. Paul declared, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17) The Apostles proclaimed the word of Christ, and the people heard, and by that hearing, they believed!

What happens as people turn from unbelief to faith? St. Paul also explained this:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you.** But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, emphasis mine)

In short, people go from being unrighteous to being the righteousness of God in Christ. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:20) If one is in Christ, He is a new creation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17), and Christ is in Him. Jesus

filled the Corinthians, such that all of that unrighteousness was in their past; they are no longer those things.

Still ascended, Jesus continues to fill all things. Like the people of Corinth, He has filled you, and so you also are washed, sanctified, and justified. Like the people of Corinth, some of you *were* some of those things—sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers—or some other thing. And you know that you still struggle with this, that, or the other thing. Nevertheless, you are filled with Jesus, and He is present with you, certainly always, but also in those times, as I said earlier, when you confess your sins and are forgiven for your sins, strengthening you for your struggle, and receiving you unto Himself. And this because you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

You have heard the message of salvation: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. And it is your joyful privilege to carry and proclaim that message to all the world—or at least, in the little corner of it in which you have been placed. People need this message of salvation, the Jesus-filled message you have been given to proclaim.

So, as He continues to fill all things, Jesus gives. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God...” In other words, Jesus has given you the apostles, prophets, and evangelists, who have recorded His Word for you, and the pastors and teachers, who preach His Word to you, that you may be equipped, that is filled with Jesus, in order to do the work of ministry. Ministry is service to your neighbor for the purpose of building up the body of Christ, and that would be the proclamation of the message of salvation to that hurting world, to the end that everyone attains the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.

If you don't believe that you have a part in bringing people to salvation, hear what is said through the evangelist St. Mark and the Apostle St. Paul. Jesus ascended far above all the heaven, that He might fill all things. They went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them... Jesus filled all things, including you, that you might proclaim Him to your neighbor, that they might be baptized and believing, washed, sanctified, and justified, no longer unrighteous, filled with Jesus—just like you. He does not leave you alone to do this, for He works with you, He works through you, in order that others might hear and believe. As St. Paul put it,

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. **For we are God's fellow workers.** You are God's field, God's building. (1 Corinthians 3:7-9, emphasis mine)

“We are God's fellow workers,” he wrote; so, you work with God, God in Christ working in you, since Christ fills you, as He fills all things.

This is what the ascension of Jesus means. This is why He fills all things: that you might be in Christ and that your neighbor might be in Christ, all having heard the message of salvation, being joined in the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, who died and rose again and ascended so that you would be forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.