

Sunday, May 12, 2024 Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

**「He ascended to heaven and sat at the right hand of God.」**

Pastor Takaaki Inoue Acts 1:3~11, Mark 16:19~20

### **❶ [He sat at the right hand of God]**

The book of Acts says, "Jesus was taken up into heaven while his disciples were watching, but he was covered with clouds and could not be seen from their eyes" (Acts 1:10). The Lord dared His disciples to show Him the image of His ascension to heaven. The Gospel of Mark says, "After the Lord Jesus had spoken to His disciples, He was taken up into heaven and seated at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19), and in the Apostles' Creed, it is confessed that "He ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." No one has ever seen Jesus seated at the right hand of God, so this is the church's confession of faith. When Jesus sat at the right hand of God, it means that He is the same as God the Father, and to sit at the right hand of God is to be the King of the kingdom of God, to whom he has been entrusted with the full power of judgment. This is what Jesus Himself said. "The Father does not judge anyone, but leaves all judgment to man" (John 5:22), which is something that can never be done in Judaism or Islam. Because their Messiah is man, not God.

●When I sang Hymn 21, No. 2, 337, "Hallelujah, the door of the kingdom, open it now, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Halleluja Originally, Christ was a resident of heaven. He lived temporarily on earth for 33 years, but he achieved salvation on earth and returned to his nostalgic home. That is why the "door of the kingdom of God" has opened. "Welcome back!" God the Father, angels, and saints would have welcomed Christ in triumph. The king has returned. It is the return of the king. (Look at the title of the postlude!) It's the same for us. Because the earth is over, we do not go to heaven as much as we have, but we are sent from heaven to earth and return to heaven again. "Thou shalt return man to dust, and thou shalt return, O Son of man" (Psalm 90:3). "Our home is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20).

In our chapel there is an icon in which Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father as God. We look up at this picture and pray to the Triune God in heaven, the King of Heaven. Ascension is the Church's confession of faith that Christ is God.

### **❷ [The incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension saved the whole of mankind]**

The Ascension teaches Christ's final work of salvation. People often say, "I was saved by the cross," but that's only part of salvation. The whole human being is saved by the incarnation, cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. The incarnation of Christ was the beginning of salvation, and the salvation of man was completely completed by taking away sin through the cross, removing death by the resurrection, and raising humanity to heaven through the ascension. It is through this mystery of one that man's salvation is complete. In the Old Testament, there is a story of the miracle of the prophet Elisha raising a dead child from life. "And when he lay down on the child, and bent down with his mouth in the child's mouth, his eyes on the child's eyes, and his hands on the child's hand, the child's body became warm" (2 Kings 4:34). He experiences the same process from birth to death in the same way, takes them on, and heals them within himself. Therefore, we are saved by the whole series of Christ's works: Nativity ~ Cross ~ Resurrection ~ Ascension. This is the teaching of the traditional church.

● When I partake of the sacrament, I always feel grateful, "Oh, Christ has come down to such sinners." The sacrament is a reenactment of the Nativity, the Cross, the Resurrection and the Ascension of Christ. The breaking of the bread means the cross, and the entry of the bread into us means that Christ lay in an unclean manger. By becoming one with the bread, we who belong to the earth are transformed into those who belong to heaven and lifted up to heaven. In fact, in the Byzantine liturgy, at the end of the sacrament, the act of holding the bread and cup aloft signifies the ascension of Christ.

We cannot ascend to heaven on our own, but we must become one with the One who came down, Christ, and be carried firmly on his shoulders, held in his arms, and brought to the kingdom of God by Him. Gregory of Nyssa in the 4th century said: "To the wandering sheep, ... That good shepherd who lays down his life is coming. He found a wandering sheep, and later He carried the cross on His shoulders, and He led the sheep into heavenly life."

### ③ [Christ is still with us in the body of the church]

The angel said to his disciples: "Why are you standing looking up to heaven, the people of Galilee? "Why" is a strange question. Jesus had left, so I was looking up lonely, thinking, "Oh, I'm gone." However, with the phrase "Why are you looking at the heavens?", the angels seem to be telling us to look to the future, not to the past, not to the past, and to look not only at the heavens but also at the earth. The angel said this to his disciples. "Do not grieve that Jesus has departed from us, but He will surely return" This was realized by the descent of

the Holy Spirit. Because the triune God is inseparable, when the Holy Spirit comes to earth, the Son and the Father will come with Him. Jesus said, "Whoever loves me keeps my word: My Father loves him, and the Father and I will go to him and dwell with him" (John 14:23). Augustine in the 4th century said:

●"He did not leave heaven when He came down to us, nor did He withdraw from us when He ascended into heaven again."

He is with us, but the situation has changed. Until now, He has been with us in the "form of the flesh," but from now on, He will be with us in the "form of the Church." The icon on the cover of the weekly report teaches it. The ascension of Christ and Mary in a prayer pose with an upright and immovable figure are depicted in a straight line. Mary is depicted as an image of the church. Because Jesus is God, He is now working in the body of the church, just as He needed a physical body to work on earth. So when you come to church, you have to think that Christ is here. The Church is filled with the Spirit of Christ. When you come to church, there are all kinds of things that remind you of Christ. Cathedrals, Bibles, sacraments, hymns, icons, crosses, altars, lamps that light a fire, incense, vestments... If you praise here, listen to the Bible, partake of the sacraments, Christ will appear. Thus came to pass, "I will be with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

●I hate churches! There are people who don't want to go because it's hard to serve and relationships are troublesome. Both Philip Yancey and C.S. Lewis left when they were young because they hated the church because it was hypocritical. But they came back. C.S. Lewis wrote: "I hated hymns, and I thought they were like bad lyrics with even worse songs. But over time, I began to see its value. ... I noticed that the hymn was still sung with a feeling of faith and service by an elderly saint sitting on the other side of the table wearing rubber shoes. That's when I realized that I didn't deserve to clean those shoes. When I found out, my self-indulgent conceit was gone." Yancey says: "The church is not supposed to be a place to provide fun, to encourage weakness, to develop self-esteem, or to cultivate friendships, but to worship God. ... I have learned that worship ornaments are only tools to bring worshippers into contact with God. ... Walter Wing says: Worship is a remembrance of who the master of the house is."

Heaven and earth were mysteriously united in Christ. The Church is the body of Christ, a place of both heavenly and earthly nature. The "Gates of Heaven" are open here. The church is a place to lift those who belong to the earth to

heaven, a place to deify and Christianize Mr./Ms.. If the church had only the scent of the earth, what hope would people have there? It is because they feel the scent of heaven that they have hope. I give praise to Christ, the master who is here, and I hope that you will meet him.