

ST. LUKE EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH-WELS

SERMON BY PASTOR ANTHONY E. SCHULTZ
ASCENSION, MAY 17, 2012 *EPHESIANS 1:16-23* NASB.



¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention *of you* in my prayers; ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸ *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

People of God—rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

I like to keep track of special days. Wednesday, May 9th was National Missing Sock Day. Did you know that? National Missing Sock—sock orphan day! I mentioned that to the ladies at my Bank and they said, “So how do you celebrate this day?” I said, “I didn’t know. I would have to find out!” You are supposed to take a few moments—and see if you can’t find those missing socks—rescue them—and restore them to a pair. Chances are—you can’t find these missing socks. Where did they go? I don’t know! So you are supposed to spend just a moment or two remembering how wonderful it was—to have them—to miss them—to perhaps throw out the remaining orphan—and then to move on! There are lots of special days to observe. Tuesday was national chocolate chip cookie day. Yesterday was wear purple for peace day. And next Thursday is national *Escargot* day. I may find some snails—sauté them in butter and garlic and have them with a glass of wine—something white—not too sweet! Today of course—is Ascension Day! I used to go to *Mimi’s Hallmark* a lot. They had cards for almost every possible occasion. They had cards I would send—when a little person would tell me their puppy or their cat or their goldfish died. They had cards to send—when you are the recipient of an organ transplant! But I don’t think they had an Ascension Day Card. There is no special traditional Ascension Day treat or sweet—no cookie or cake or candy or beverage for today. There is no traditional Ascension Day thing to wear on your lapel or on a t-shirt. The world has failed to find a way to make money off of Ascension Day. And so today—as far as the world is concerned—today is Thursday the 17th—a day like any other day. It is only by the grace of God that you and I know today is special. This Ascension Day—as we consider part of the letter to the people in Ephesus—God’s Word says:

Pastors Pray For Their Sheep!

- a. We thank Jesus for you
- b. We pray the eyes of your heart are bright

Ephesians – people in Ephesus – what does this mean to us? The People’s Bible volume on Galatians and Ephesians was written by President Armin J. Panning. Professor Panning was my Greek teacher at Northwestern College. He taught us the Gospel of St. John. The part of God’s Word we are concentrating on – written by the Apostle Paul. The letter begins, **“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus – a prisoner – an ambassador in chains!”** Remember how it got to that point? Paul came home from his 3rd missionary journey – home to Jerusalem. There the orthodox Jews came after him with mob violence! Roman soldiers stepped in to rescue Paul. Now Paul found himself in the clutches of the Roman legal system. For two years he languished in prison in the provincial capital of Caesarea, where a corrupt Roman governor held him, hoping for a bribe. (Cf. Acts 24:26,27) In frustration Paul appealed his case to the highest court in Rome, a hearing before Caesar himself! Although shipwrecked on the way to Rome – Paul eventually arrived there safely. Under house arrest – awaiting trial Paul did not waste time. He talked about Christ crucified and risen – to the Roman soldier who was blessed to be chained to Paul. Paul talked about Christ crucified and risen – to the people who came to visit and encourage him. And Paul wrote what have been called the captivity letters – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and to his friend Philemon. The Apostle Paul had worked according to His Heavenly Father’s plan. Paul would begin in a synagogue – a Jewish Bible school – where people were very familiar with Old Testament Scripture. Paul would explain to them how God had kept his promise – sending His One and Only Son Jesus – born of a Virgin in Bethlehem – **who was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities** – with the wicked in his death on a tree – lifted up on the cross – to atone for our sins. This would invariably cause a split in the synagogue – some believing the Gospel – and others rejecting it – in order to remain in their Jewish Old Testament faith. In Ephesus – those who believed in Jesus and were thrown out of their synagogue – reached out with the Gospel to their Gentile neighbors – people of Galatia – present day Turkey. By the grace of God – many of them believed and were saved.

The letter to the Ephesians is not very long – just 6 chapters. The first three chapters talk about God’s plan to rescue us from sin and guilt. God made this plan in eternity – before the creation of the world. God put this plan into action – when the fullness of time had come – just the right moment – some 2,000 years ago – the Christ-child was born in Bethlehem – was crucified outside the city walls of Jerusalem to forgive us. The second 3 chapters of Ephesians talks about our response to Jesus’ grace and mercy. When Jesus’ forgiving love fills your heart – we will live a life of love and service to God and our neighbor. Remember our closest neighbors are our family – our parents – our brothers and sisters – our spouse! The Ephesians learned about the Table of Duties – roles and responsibilities for husbands and wives, children and parents – slaves and masters. Ephesians is what we quote in our marriage – our wedding service. Ephesians is where God’s Word says marriage is like a picture of our much Jesus loves His bride the Church! Ephesians chapter 5:25 is the verse we say again and again, **“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her – to make her holy – cleansing her with the washing of water and the word...in the same way husbands out to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself...”** Remember! When the husband fulfills his role – loving his wife like Christ loved the Church – houses become homes – warmed by Jesus’ forgiving love!

Paul wrote: **¹⁵ For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers...** Pastors pray for their sheep. If we wake up at 2 or 3

in the morning — because an ambulance is taking someone to the hospital ER — or the Flight for Life helicopter — is making its u-turn overhead — or the train is blowing its whistle as it speeds down the track and you wake up. We pray for you! We pray that Jesus will heal hearts that are wounded from all kinds of hurt and pain and sadness. We pray that Jesus will keep our marriages strong — husband and wife — close to their Savior and forgiving each other. We pray for people who struggle with an addiction to drugs or alcohol or tobacco or “hugs and kisses”. We pray that Jesus will make us kind and gentle, thoughtful and careful — helping people in need. We pray that Jesus will spread the Gospel so that we will read our Bible, our Meditations, our Synod e-mail devotion, and Forward In Christ, and books from our Publishing House! We watched a video during a stewardship workshop on Saturday. It was this very kind and gentle little grandpa saying how nice Church was and Bible reading and Bible study. Just be very cautious — very careful — just don’t get carried away. Just come to Church once in a while — just read your Bible once in a while. Just don’t get too caught up in all this “Church stuff”! Then he wrote his name on one of those *Hello! My name is...* And he wrote the name Satan! Think about it! The devil would be very pleased if we would be just *luke* warm — complacent — coasting — getting by — falling asleep — distracted and unconcerned. You can’t drive through spiritual life — not paying attention! Pastors pray for their sheep. And the sheep need to pray for their Pastors — so we are all safe!

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints... *The eyes of your heart may be enlightened!* This is talking about attitude—about faith—that has child like trust and confidence in the power of the Gospel to bring us to saving faith! Because we have saving faith—we have an inheritance unlike any earthly inheritance. An earthly inheritance can be very nice—a piece of furniture that used to belong to your parents or great grandparents—a dining room table that you sat at when you were growing up—a grandfather clock that chimes every quarter hour—a piece of jewelry—my grandfather’s pocketwatch—that he got when he turned 21—now it’s over 100 years old! These things are very nice. But they are only things—things and stuff—that break down. Robbers and thieves can break into your home and steal them. My child-hood home was robbed one Ascension Day. My piggy bank—with the silver dollar I got on each birthday was stolen—gone for good! What would those silver dollars be worth today? I have no idea. It doesn’t really matter. The things of this world don’t matter. All that really matters is that Jesus died and rose again. He ascended into heaven—to prepare a place for us. He ascended into heaven—to intercede—to pray for us. Jesus ascended into heaven—to make everything that happens to work out for our forever good. Jesus ascended into heaven—to return one day—maybe even today to take us to heaven.

Ascension—and in fact every time we come to Church—is about **Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.** Jesus took all our sins away! Trevell Coleman—is 36 years old. Just the other day he walked into a police station and confessed to murder! Coleman told the police details of a crime he committed. Coleman said he was riding on his bike when he came upon a man—John Henkel—outside on the sidewalk. He intended to rob Henkel—when Henkel resisted. So Coleman took off—and as he took off he looked back and shot Henkel three times in the chest with a .40-caliber gun. Coleman then fled—and tossed his weapon into the East River. Henkel was rushed to St. Luke’s Hospital where he was pronounced dead. Coleman has racked

up more than 25 arrests in the least nine years—but was never a suspect in this robbery—turned murder 17 years ago. But he said the guilt was eating him up on the inside—to the point that he had to confess! Guilt is a terrible thing—the painful responsibility for hurtful sins and mistakes. Jesus suffered on a Roman cross—to wash away all our guilty stains. Jesus died and rose again so that one day we too can come home to Heaven—where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain—where everything will be better than new! Together with the Apostle John we can pray—even so come quickly Lord Jesus to take us to our forever Home. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

Rev. Anthony E. Schultz