

# Ascended, But Still Present

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## Grace Protestant Reformed Church

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Our scripture reading this morning is John 14. John 14. You are familiar with this as what Jesus said and some of the things that he prayed the very last night of his life with his disciples and he's telling them that he's going to leave them but he's also going to tell them that he's going to be with them, and those are the two things that we see in the sermon this morning in connection with Lord's Day 18. "I'm leaving you in the ascension but I'm going to be with you."

John 14,

1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. 4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. 5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? 6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. 7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. 8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. 9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? 10 Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. 12 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. 13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. 15 If ye love me, keep my commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; 17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth

with you, and shall be in you. 18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. 19 Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. 20 At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. 21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. 22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? 23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. 24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. 25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. 26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. 27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. 28 Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. 29 And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. 30 Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. 31 But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

That's the reading of the holy scripture this morning. It's on the basis of that passage and others like it that we have the teaching of the catechism in Lord's Day 18. Lord's Day 18 in the back of the psalter on page 10, we have Questions 46 through 49, a relatively long Lord's Day if you compare it to Lord's Day 17 on the resurrection, Lord's Day 18 on the ascension is about three times longer, and if you ask why, the answer is in history. And so before we read Lord's Day 18, I want you to know a little bit of the history. Lord's Day 18 reflects the difference between the Calvinists and the Lutherans at the time of the Reformation.

You know, in the 1500s when Protestantism came out of the Roman Catholic Church there were three branches of Protestantism. One was the Anabaptists, the forerunners of Baptists today, we're not thinking of them now; the other two branches were the Lutherans and the Calvinists, and as similar as Lutherans and Calvinists were, they had one fundamental difference and that was the view of the Lord's Supper. What do you believe happens in the Lord's Supper? Is Christ in his human nature present in the Lord's Supper? That was the question. So when you see the bread and wine in a little while again there, the Lutherans would say, "The human nature of Jesus is in that bread and in that wine, with it, over it, under it, but when you eat that bread and wine, you will be partaking of the very human nature of Jesus Christ." And the Calvinists said, "No, that's not true."

Questions 47 and 48 really give expression to that disagreement. We'll read them and then I'll explain that a little bit more. This is Lord's Day 18.

Q. 46. How dost thou understand these words, "He ascended into heaven"?

A. That Christ, in sight of His disciples, was taken up from earth into heaven; and that He continues there for our interest, until He comes again to judge the quick and the dead.

Q. 47. Is not Christ then with us even to the end of the world, as He hath promised?

A. Christ is very man and very God; with respect to His human nature, He is no more on earth [there's their rebuttal of the Lutherans with respect to his human nature, he is no more on earth]; but with respect to His Godhead, majesty, grace, and spirit, He is at no time absent from us.

Q. 48. But if His human nature is not present wherever His Godhead is, are not then these two natures in Christ separated from one another?

A. Not at all, for since the Godhead

Now think carefully, the Lutherans were accusing the Calvinists of separating the two natures of Christ, human nature not with us, divine nature with us, they're separated, and the Calvinists then responded in our catechism in the Answer to 48,

A. Not at all, for since the Godhead is illimitable [that is, does not have limits] and omnipresent, it must necessarily follow that the same [that is, the Godhead] is beyond the limits of the human nature He assumed, and yet is nevertheless in this human nature and remains personally united to it.

Q. 49. Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension into heaven?

A. First, that He is our advocate in the presence of His Father in heaven; secondly, that we have our flesh in heaven as a sure pledge that He, as the Head, will also take up to Himself, us, His members; thirdly, that He sends us His Spirit as an earnest [a down-payment], by whose power we seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, and not things on earth.

So looking at Lord's Day 18 we see that 46 and 49 would have been asked and answered alone but for that Lutheran-Calvinist disagreement. It relates, you see, to the ascension. Is Christ there in the bread, with and under the bread, in the wine, with and under the wine?

The Calvinist said, "He ascended into heaven." The Lutheran said, "But his human nature at the ascension became omnipresent so that his human nature is there now too." The Calvinist said, "No, his human nature is in heaven." The Lutheran said, "It is in heaven but his human nature at the ascension changed to be omnipresent and therefore there it is."

So that's the connection now. That's why 47 and 48 are in the Heidelberg Catechism. What happened at the ascension, that's the question. Now that debate isn't raging anymore so much. I don't hear Calvinists and Lutherans writing about this when they speak to each other but they don't even speak to each other very much anymore, the differences are pretty much forgotten, but what must not be forgotten for us is the more important matter that the catechism does bring out. Is he really in heaven for our interest? The answer to 46 says, "He continues therefore our interest." Really, we say. Wouldn't it have been better had he stayed here if he really had our interest in view? Or to use the language of Question 49, is there really an advantage to us that Christ ascended into heaven? I think, you may say, it would have been better had he just stayed here and not gone there. Why the ascension? We're not happy about the ascension sometimes anymore than the disciples of Jesus were happy when he said to them, "I'm leaving you. I'm going away." And therefore Jesus recognized the sorrow that filled their heart and he explained in John 14, 15, 16 and 17, he explained to them why he had to go away.

So let's not deal this morning with the controversy between the Lutherans and the Calvinists. You may study that, you may read about it, the ministers teach the kids in catechism about that, let's look this morning at the reality that Christ is ascended but still present. How can that be that he left and he's still here? And let's see in the first place just that fact that he is really present and how, and then in the second place and that more at length, how that that's profitable for us. So the theme of the sermon ascended but really present, first point, really present, second point, profitably present, and we're going to spend most of the time on the second point this morning.

Jesus left the church at his ascension but that does not mean that he isn't still with us. That's the point that needs to be made first. Jesus left the church when he ascended but that does not mean that he is not still with us. So we need to establish in the first place that he left when he ascended. He left. The Lutherans are wrong and the Calvinists are right on that point, when Jesus ascended he departed. The ascension wasn't, as the Lutherans said, that his human nature, as it were, expanded and become omnipresent. The ascension is not that, the ascension is as we read it in Acts 1, he departed.

If you look in John 14 that we read, in John 16 that we didn't read, those passages, those chapters are full of Jesus saying, "I go away." He meant that. John 16:5, "But now I go my way to him." John 16:7, "It is expedient for you that I go away." At the end of verse 7, "I depart." In verse 16 of chapter 16, "I go to the Father." In verse 28 of chapter 16, "I leave the world." His disciples said to him at that point, "Now you speak plainly," but he had to say it about 10 times because these are perhaps 6 through 10, chapter 14, he had said it five or six or seven times too. We read that, verse 2, "I go to prepare a place."

Verse 3, "I go and prepare a place." Verse 4, "where I go you know." Verse 28, "I go away."

What Jesus said he would do, he did, and the disciples saw it with their own eyes. Read Acts 1 where after Jesus rose from the dead appeared to the disciples for about 40 days. He came to that 40<sup>th</sup> day, went to the top of a mountain with them and said, "Now I'm going away," and they saw him ascend up into heaven and disappear behind a cloud. They knew exactly what was happening because Jesus told them what would happen and that's why the angels had to come and comfort them because they were disappointed that Jesus went away. The disciples did not hear the angels say, "You mistaken what you saw, he's really still here in the human nature." No, the disciples said, "As he left, so he will return, but he did depart from you." And now when we think of Jesus, we need to think of Jesus sitting on the right hand of God on his throne governing all the worlds. That's where he is in his human nature.

So when the Apostle Paul was taught by Jesus for those three years as he was training to be a minister, you see, the Apostle Paul was not with Jesus during his earthly ministry but became a convert after that and then spent three years training for it, the Apostle Paul learned from Jesus this very thing that the disciples already had learned. And so Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:6 and 8, "we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." You and I are all now at home in the body and therefore we are absent from the Lord with respect to the Lord's human nature. Then he said, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." When we die we're going to be absent from this body and then we are going to be present with the Lord in his human nature. And that's why we want him to come again in the end, and that's why we desire by the grace of God sometime to die because when we know we die we're going to be absent from this body and from all of our loved ones, but we are going to be with him. With him. He went away.

It was their farewell party, as it were, though, calling that meeting the last night before he was arrested a party is probably not the right way to speak of it. It was their farewell gathering. Jesus said to them, "I'm not going to have time to talk to you more about this because the evil one comes and I'm going to be arrested so I want you to know in advance I'm going away." It reminds you, doesn't it, of a time when you sit at the airport with your loved ones who live in a different country perhaps or even a different state but far away, you say, "Farewell. We're leaving." You embrace, you shed some tears, and you say good-bye, and then you see them get in that plane and take off and are gone. It reminds me of what we did with my wife's parents every time they went back to Singapore. We said with tears and embraced good-bye. But it's like probably a little bit more like what you'd do with your loved one when they're on their deathbed, we did with my mother last October when she was on her deathbed. We said good-bye and we knew that she was leaving us.

That's what Jesus did in this meeting with his disciples, but that does not mean that he is not yet with us. That might seem the conclusion from all this but that's just not true. It's

our experience that that's not true and it's the testimony of the Bible that that's not true. Listen to what Jesus said at the end of that 40 days, here's the meeting in the Upper Room, the good-bye meeting, then he was crucified and buried and rose again and met with them for 40 days, at this good-bye, at his ascension he said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world I'm with you." And then when you read in another gospel what happened, they, the disciples, went forth and preached everywhere and this amazing statement, "the Lord working with them." Think about that, the Lord was working with them. He wasn't absent from them. He was in a very real important way with them otherwise they could not have done their work. We need to remember that as churches and consistories and families and individuals.

Then and now Jesus was and is with them. How could the church have grown the way it did after he ascended had Jesus not been with them? How could that little band of disciples, let's call it a consistory or a session, how could that little band of disciples have made the decisions that they did had Jesus not been with them? How could they have expressed the unity and lived in the kind of peace that they did had Jesus not been among them? And how could they have had the power to go out into all of the world and preach and then the blessing upon that preaching that came had Jesus not been with them? He was with them and so you and I need to remember that Jesus is with us or we'll never survive, and in the consistory room over there every time they meet, the elders need to remember Jesus is with them, and when you as a family have a meeting because there's distressing news or prospects for your family, you need to remember Jesus is with you, and when you are all by yourself, when you think no one is with you and perhaps no one is with you, that is, of your family or your friends, you have a friend who sticks closer than a brother who is with you.

Though he ascended into heaven to leave, that does not mean that Jesus is not still today in a very real way with us but the question is how? How? And we need to understand that and the understanding of that comes by remembering what we learned in catechism that Jesus has two natures, a human nature and a divine nature, and he is not with us in his human nature. His human nature went to heaven. His human nature ascended.

Remember, children, Jesus had a human nature, it means that he's just like us. These kind of eyes, face and head, body, will, emotions, feelings, thinking, just like us. The only difference between him and us is that he didn't have sin and we do. But he was just like us in his human nature. But the Bible also says that he has a divine nature. He's God also and that does not describe you. You are not God and I am not God. Jesus was God, both human and God and now in his humanity Jesus left and went to heaven, but that does not mean that he is not with us in a very real way and this is the way in which he's with us, by his Spirit.

And before you imagine that you think that that's a cop-out, he left us in his human nature but he's back with us in his Spirit, listen to what he said. Jesus said, "I am going to give you my Spirit." We read John 14:16, "I'll pray the Father, he shall give you another comforter that he may abide with you forever even the Spirit of truth." Jesus said, "I'm going to pray to the Father. He's going to send you another comforter." Well, you say, "Another comforter? Isn't it you, Jesus, that said you would come back?" Well, just start

here, Jesus said, "I will send you a comforter, the Spirit." But then listen to what he says about that Spirit, "I am coming to you in that Spirit. When you receive the Spirit, you are receiving me."

So verse 3 of chapter 14, "if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again." Verse 28, "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you." And verse 18, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." Those are not references to his Second Coming which is yet for us in the future. Those are references to when he, Jesus, came back on Pentecost in his Spirit. Jesus did. Jesus is with them and that's true for us today too. Jesus who, as we saw from the scripture spent nine months in the womb of Mary and then was born and just as you and I mature and grow physically and intellectually and even spiritually, he did. That man, Jesus, who had brothers and sisters and parents and friends and disciples and students and opponents, enemies, that man who in the end of his life was arrested, put on a cross, died, was buried, came out of the grave in the body, that man who ascended up into heaven, that one not in his human nature but in his Spirit, that one is still with us today. He in his Spirit is with us personally. He's near us. He's for us. He's not against us. He does everything from his throne for us, and he does everything in us for us also. Everything is for our advantage. Everything is for our profit. He's there for our interest. Don't ever think, people of God, that Jesus is there as our enemy, always think he's there for us profitably, it's for our profit.

So now let's go on in the sermon and see how it's profitable that he's present in us and with us, how it was profitable that he left us but yet is with us. I remind you again the answer in 46, he is there for our interest, and the question in 49, it is an advantage to us that Christ ascended. Think interest. Think advantage. Jesus is with us as a church. Jesus is with us as churches. Jesus is with us as a denomination and Jesus is with his holy catholic church in all of the world. We emphasize here church because it's a mistake to think personally first. It's right to think, first of all, ecclesiastically, that is, as a body and though it is true and that will be the second part of this second point, he's with you individually, you must not think individualistically. What I mean by that is he said to his disciples, "I'm going to come to you," and he used the plural there. He could have used the singular, "I'm going to come to thee and thee and thee," but he said, "I'm going to come to you." And then when he did come, he didn't come to an individual out in his home up there in Dan or down there in another city, he, when the church was gathered together at Jerusalem as a body, he came to them as a body. Now in individuals but as a body and that's the emphasis we need to make at the start now. Now Christianity is not individualistic. Christianity is pluralistic. We think as a body. We live as a body and if you try to live apart from that body, you are in deep deep trouble. Christ comes to the church.

Now what Jesus emphasized in John 14 through 17 and especially in 14 and 16 is that he comes to the church by his Spirit of truth, or we could say it this way, he dwells among us with truth because the Spirit is called the Spirit of truth, and you can't say that often enough because that is fundamentally important. You want to know how Jesus is with us? Just lift up the Bible and say he's with us this way. He's with us through his word. And you take the word away and ask Jesus to be with you, he will say, "No, I am not with you

in that way. I am with you in this way, the word." And that's why we are a church that preaches the word, opens the word, explains the word, because when we do that, then Jesus himself is here in his Spirit.

He is the Spirit of truth which means in the second place that if you are tempted to join a church where all of the people are very friendly and there's all kinds of activity in that church and there seems to be blessed unity in that church but they don't have the word, then you ought not join that church because Jesus isn't there. Jesus is in his church by the word. The word. I say that because it's very very tempting at times when we're discouraged about the church and there have been difficulties in the church to say, "I'm going to go elsewhere," and we make a dreadful mistake because elsewhere doesn't have the word perhaps. That's not to say that every elsewhere is without the word but it's a caution to you that wherever you are, you go where the word is because that's where the Lord Jesus Christ is.

That's why the church has in the past always said you want to find the true church? Then you look for the marks of the true church and those marks of the true church are really one, the mark of the word, the word preached and the word symbolized in the sacraments and the word applied to those who do not live according to it, and the application of that is discipline. But it's all the word. You want to know where the true church is that you ought to join? You find the church that has the word. I'll come back to that in a moment but here's the second application. Now comes out the importance of church membership because Jesus Christ dwells in the church as a body. He poured out his Spirit and comes to the church as a body and as soon as you or I say that I am going to be safe and have Jesus apart from the body, we're making another dreadful mistake. We need to be a part of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what makes leaving the church so serious a matter. That's what makes excommunication from the church such a serious matter. You are told when you are excommunicated, God forbid, that you are being cut off from the body of Christ. Now it doesn't matter what you may think about that or say about that, the only thing that matters is what Christ says about that. When you are cut off from the church, excommunicated from the church, you are no longer in communion with the Lord Jesus Christ and there isn't anything more serious than that. Christ is present in his church by his word. Be a member of the church.

There's another application, though, that needs to be made in that connection and that is and that's going to spill into the second point, the second part of this second point where we talk about individuals, and that is that that church that truly has the word preached, symbolized and applied in discipline, that church that truly has the word in which the Spirit of truth has worked will also be a church that with all of its might strives for unity and holiness. With all of its might desires to be unified and not divided, and with all of its might wants to be a people separated from sin and devoted to God because, you see, it's possible for a church to speak truth, to point to truth in the sacraments and even exercise discipline but that church doesn't really love truth, it doesn't embrace the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ as it's here but it's all formality, it's all outward show. There are churches like that. We must not be a church like that.



Then we hear this caution and warning and exhortation: you are the church that has the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of truth, insofar as you with all of your might want to be united and are going to do everything in your power to stop division and to live with all of the other members of the church, and you as a church of Christ are going to do everything in your power to be separate from sin and devoted to God. That's the church that truly has the Spirit of truth in her, not that church that simply speaks truth but the church that loves truth. Not the church that simply teaches truth but the church that lives truth, and the living of the truth is going to be a church that's marked by a spirit of unity and marked by holiness.

But though Jesus doesn't dwell in individuals individualistically, that is, in isolation, he does dwell in individuals and we may be very thankful for that too. He does that by faith. By faith. How does he come to you? By faith. The other night when I was visiting Heidi and family, then I read in Ephesians 3 the beautiful prayer of the Apostle Paul and the very first petition he made for the church is that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith. By faith. Christ dwells in us and lives with us, by faith in the scriptures and by faith in the Christ of the scriptures.

Then Christ identifies those who have faith, identifies those with whom he is present by faith as those who, number 1, love him, and number 2, keep his word. Let me say that again. Christ dwells in our hearts individually by faith and Christ in John 14:15-16 identifies those who have Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith in this way, those who have Christ in their hearts by faith love him and keep his commandments, and so important is that that it appears that Jesus is teaching heresy. "If you love me and keep my commandments, I will ask the Father to come and love you." Verse 15 and 16. Verse 21, "He that hath my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me and he that loves me shall be loved of my Father." It almost seems that Jesus himself is reversing the order of God's work and our work. Of course, Jesus is not a heretic but Jesus puts it that way to emphasize it so much that you must not think that Christ dwells in your heart by faith except you are one who loves him and keeps his word.

The same thing may be said about individuals as is said about churches. There may be a church that's all show and on the outside it's all good, and in the public teaching it's all true, but behind the scenes under the facade of speaking truth and teaching truth, there's corruption and disunity and no interest in holiness and devotion to God. Well, that church isn't a true church though it appears to have the mark of the word, so also with regard to us individually. I may say that Christ dwells in my heart by faith but I must show you by my love for him and by my keeping of his word, and my love for him and keeping of his word is manifested in my love for you and you and you, all of you, no matter what you're like. I love you and if I do not, insofar as I do not, I show you that Christ is not with me in my heart to comfort me, strengthen me, declare righteousness to me. He's not there. Much as I may say it, he isn't with me. He's departed from me.

But he is and that's the point now, that's the positive point here in this second point. He left us in the ascension in order that he could come back to us in a more profitable way and bless us. Think of three benefits now for a little while, the benefit of advocacy, the

benefit of companionship, and the benefit of holiness. He's our advocate. Question 49 says that first, what advantage is it to us that Christ ascended into heaven? First, that he's our advocate in the presence of the Father. An advocate is an important person in a high place who's able to speak to someone over you in order that that someone over you may do you good. We have a friend in high places, it's the Lord Jesus. That's why he went into heaven to be our advocate. It says there he's our attorney speaking on our behalf to the judge, telling to the judge, "You must declare him innocent." And if the judge asks that attorney, advocate, lawyer, why his client must be declared innocent, the attorney says unlike any other attorney that you may hire, "I paid for his sins." And the judge says, "Righteous."

And now watch, Jesus comes down from the judge's bench and speaks in your bedroom at night when you are feeling guilty of all of your sins and feel ashamed because you did it again and he says, "Innocent. Innocent." He doesn't speak to you who are going to do it again the next day deliberately. He doesn't speak to you who aren't interested in loving him but just getting away with sin. He doesn't speak to you but to you who embrace him by faith, who love him and want to keep his word, and are ashamed that you haven't and are going to do better by his Spirit the next day. To you he speaks, "Innocent. Not guilty. Righteous with my own righteousness."

That's what an advocate does. Christ in the presence of God is our advocate but here's the point: he doesn't leave the declaration of the Father in heaven up there in the courtroom with us in jail in our misery at night when we go to bed, he comes from heaven and speaks in our consciousness and consciences and says, "You're innocent. You're righteous. I'm going to clothe you with the righteousness of my Son. I've going to cover you with his white robes and I'm going to do that in such a way that you may know that when God looks down from heaven upon you, he doesn't see any of those sins that make you ashamed." None of them.

It's a benefit that Christ went into heaven to become our advocate. John said that in his first epistle, "I write to you that you sin not but if any man sin, you may know this, we have an advocate in the presence of the Father in heaven." Don't sin, says Christ to you, but when you do in your weakness and you are filled with shame and guilt, remember you have an advocate who pleads your cause when you ask him and then brings the answer of the judge back to you and says, "Not guilty."

The second advantage of Christ in heaven is companionship. Oh, companionship, what everyone needs. Some don't admit it but everyone needs companionship. You can only illustrate this with a husband and wife in a painful way when you imagine husbands losing their wives or wives their husbands. In a good marriage the most precious thing for any husband or wife is the companionship of their spouse and they don't want to lose their spouse. Jesus says to you, "I am your companion." Whether she's still living and not able to commune with you as sometimes happens, or whether the Lord takes them in death as sometimes happens, you don't have that companion but Jesus says, "I am a friend who sticks closer than a brother. I am a friend of you and a companion of you who is closer than a spouse." And you know that because you've talked to widows and widowers

who've lost their spouses and when they are in the strength of their faith they will say to you what an old neighbor of mine said to me in Hudsonville, "I never feel alone." Not a Protestant Reformed man but a godly Christian man lived right next to us and we helped him out once in awhile pick up his old wife from the floor when she fell, and then finally she died and I would visit him once in a while and he'd tell me stories of falling asleep on his couch and waking up and seeing his wife there and then realize she's not there. She isn't, but he said to me, "I'm never alone." Why is that? Because Christ is dwelling in his heart by faith and I knew it because he loved Jesus and he kept his word. Companionship. Companionship.

Then in the third place the blessing is the blessing of holiness. Advocacy, companionship, and holiness and, oh, how we need holiness as much as we need the others. But when the advocate declares to us our righteousness in Christ and when he comes and becomes our companion, we want nothing more than to be holy as he is holy. When we know that someday we're going to be absent from this body and present with the Lord, we want now to be like him, as much like him as possible. He that has this hope in him purifies himself even as he is pure. Holiness. He's the Spirit of truth but he's also the Holy Spirit, and though you may identify someone as being filled with the Spirit and churches filled with the Spirit, if they love truth you may also identify them this way, they're holy and they want to be holy and only holy and hate it when they aren't.

Advocacy, companionship, and holiness and now the end of the sermon needs to ask the hard question: but still wouldn't it have been better had Jesus just stayed here? We've seen the truth now, the doctrine that Jesus left in the human nature, came back in his Spirit so that he himself is with us, doesn't that still beg the question wouldn't it have been better had he stayed in his human nature? Why couldn't he have just stayed? Well, let me propose that question to you. You have two choices: that he stayed in his human nature and is with us that way as he was with the disciples, or that he's with us in the way he is today by his Spirit. You choose one, human nature as with the disciples, or as now. And if you choose human nature as with the disciples, for example, in this week the elders are going to meet again for a consistory meeting and they're going to face difficult questions as consistories always do, and they choose that Jesus be with them as he was with the disciples, then I have news for you and I don't mean to be spotting either, "Get in line," because his human nature isn't omnipresent and Hope's consistory is waiting for him to come, and Hudsonville's consistory, and Faith's consistory, and Holland's consistory, and they're all waiting for him. Do you really want him as he was before he ascended? You have a family meeting, family troubles, parents dealing with a wayward son or daughter, trouble in a daughter or son's marriage or whatever the burdens may be and they get together in a family meeting and sit in the living room and say, "I want Christ to be here in his human nature as he was with the disciples." Be careful. Be careful what you would prefer because Jesus said, "It's expedient that I go away."

John 16, read that, "Sorrow filled your heart but you need to know it's expedient that I go away." And the proof of that is, as they say, in the pudding. What were the disciples before he ascended and came back in the Spirit? Watch Peter hide by the fire afraid of admitting that he was one of them. Watch John Mark flee naked when they came to arrest

Jesus and all the other disciples scattered. Listen to them, "I'm going back fishing." And then see what happened after he came back to them, they're bold as lions, they're not afraid of anyone. "Arrest us. It's okay. We're not worried. We're going to preach Jesus." Watch them in their meetings making decisions. They were able to come to truth because the Spirit was in each one of them, in them, in their mind, in their heart, in their will, and he was with the word that he had brought to them, and then they wrote that word down in the epistles. They wrote that word down in the gospels. They read that word again in the Old Testament scriptures and their eyes were opened and they said to themselves, "Why didn't we see this before? Now we understand it." They were ignorant before, they were wise after. They were cowards before, they were bold as lions after.

Don't ask that Jesus be present with us in the way that he was before he ascended, be very very glad that he's with us now and then let him be with you now in this way, that you believe him, that you listen to him speak to you because he's not with you apart from the word, that's why in all of the consistory meetings and all your family meetings and all your husband/wife meetings, and all your school meetings, and all of the other meetings, the word, this is how Jesus is with you. Then he'll dwell in your hearts by faith and make you wise where you were ignorant and bold where you were fearful. He is with you, with you always. He never leaves you. He's your Savior. He is. To comfort you, "I will not leave you comfortless." To strengthen you, "I won't let you be weak." To take you out of the darkness, many groped in darkness, may he give you light by his word so that you not grope in darkness. And may you be bold and fearless and holy and united. Amen.

Let's pray.

*Father in heaven, we thank thee for thy word, we thank thee for Jesus who is the Word, for his presence with us and in us, for the ascension apart from which he could not be with us as he is, for hope in his Second Coming, and for the ability to face all of the troubles in this life with confidence that thou art doing what is good. Forgive, Lord, our sins. We're ashamed of them. We're embarrassed by them. We want to be pleasing to thee not only in the righteousness that Christ imputes to us but with a righteousness that Christ imparts to us as well so that we live in a way that honors thee. In Jesus' name. Amen.*