**Taken From Sight; Given to Faith**

Based on [Acts 1:1-11](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Ac1.1-11)

Preached on May 8, 2016

The Sunday after the Ascension

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

At the end of each year's confirmation class, I have an exam. And the thing about exams or tests is that you can fail them. I remember after one exam, I was greeting a parishioner and her Grandson after service. The Grandson said, “**Did I fail the test**?” Before I could answer, the grandmother interrupted, “**Now, now, nobody can fail Confirmation.**”

Yes you can fail confirmation, because you can reject the knowledge of Christ. **For instance, if a confirmand cannot recite the apostle’s creed, they should by no means be “confirmed” in the faith by the Pastor and Congregation**.

The Apostle’s creed is a short summary of Christian doctrine. **It does not include every doctrine and teaching of the Christian faith, but what it does confess must be known by everyone who would call themselves Christian.** And our church year, and it’s seasons in fact, are set up to have us observe every year, feast days that celebrate the different events in the life of Christ and in the life of the Church. C**hrist’s conception, his birth, his suffering, his crucifixion, death and burial, his having raised from the dead and now today we are celebrating his ascension into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty**. Christ ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father. What does this mean?

On the Confirmation exam I would often include this multiple choice question: "**Why don't we see Jesus now**?" (a) because he's dead and buried, (b) because he's very sneaky, (c) because he lives in another part of the world or **(d) because he's ascended into heaven**?

No Christ is not dead and buried, he was, but he is no longer. He is raised from the dead. That’s Easter! No Christ is not sneaky. Those who had him arrested, who came to him at night in a mob, Judas who betrayed his Rabbi with a kiss, those who did wicked things are the sneaky ones who do not come into the light lest their works should be exposed (John 3:20). But Christ answers his accusers, “**I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret”** (John 18:20).

No, Christ is not in another part of the world, living in hermetic seclusion. Jesus, though not of the world, is ever in the world. **He does not retreat from the world or condemn the world, but rather ministered in the world, died for the sin of the world** (John 3:16) **and continues to give his flesh for the life of the world** (John 6:51). B**ut his kingdom is not of this world** (John 18:36), **it of the world to come**, the world he will bring with him when he comes again to judge the living and the dead.

Why then don’t we see Jesus now? **It is because 40 days after he rose from the dead, after he appeared to the disciples and breathed on them the Holy Spirit, after he encouraged Thomas to touch his wounds, after he revealed himself in the breaking of the bread…40 days after the vindicated Christ appeared to his disciples alive and continued to present himself alive by many proofs** (Acts 1:3), **Jesus was “lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”** Why don’t we see Jesus now? Because he has ascended into heaven, which means what is says in our first reading from Acts 1, that he has been taken out of our sight (Acts 1:3).

Our first lesson reads, "**And when [Jesus] had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.**" Jesus has ascended to heaven in glory, a to the place where he came from, though returns now as a man, in our human flesh to reign at the right hand of God and to uphold the universe by the word of his power. But brother's and sister's, Jesus still has not left the world. He has only been taken from our sight.

Jesus said to Thomas, who doubted that he had raised from the dead, "**Do you believe [that I have been raised] because you see me; blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed**." Your salvation, your having a right relationship with God is not based on what you see with your eyes, but with what you believe in your heart. You are saved by faith. And God has made it so that his church is built not on believing what you have seen, but on believing the reports of what others have seen. Faith is quite literally, "The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

You all know the passage from 1 Corinthians 13, where St. Paul writes, "**Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love**." The reason love is greater than faith and greater than hope, is this: When Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead...every eye will see him; there will no longer be faith and there will no longer be hope. Faith can only exist apart from seeing it's object; hope can only exist before it's object is visibly delivered. Faith and hope don't exist in heaven because in heaven we will see God face to face; and we have all that we hoped for. But love, love is the greatest gift of the Spirit, for love abides both in heaven with the saints and on earth with those who believe in Christ, that is the Church which, in the present age by grace, through faith, subsists in love, "**which binds everything together in perfect harmony'** (Colossians 3:14).

When you confess that Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, what you are confessing with your lips is that you believe that Jesus is still in the world even though you don't see him. **This means first of all that Jesus is not absent, or on a vacation in heaven, waiting for us to catch up with him. He is not chained to the right hand of the Father, looking down upon us from a distance, wondering if we're ever going to get our act together.** Jesus is alive and he is in the world and he continues to rule over the hearts and the minds of his people. He continues to send his Holy Spirit who calls and gathers his sheep together; who enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth. Jesus says that if you have a problem with your brother "tell it to the church", for where two or three are gathered in my name (Jesus says), there I am among them."

It is to our disgrace that we think size matters in a church, that only a congregation that is big and growing bigger has the blessing of God and the presence of Christ. **Christ, from heaven is present on earth where a measly two people are gathered in his Name, according to the sound doctrine of his Word.** But a thousand people who gather together while compromising on God's word, or confusing his commands and promises, do not gather in the true Name of Jesus, and he does not guarantee to be with them.

But even two people who gather together, speak the catechism, hear and receive God's word, Jesus is with them by faith. **A famous megachurch Pastor Andy Stanley said recently that parents who attend a small church are and I quote "stinking-selfish."** He said kids have the God-given right to be a part of a big church where they can connect with a bunch of people. Andy Stanley is lying. Christ never says, "**Go to a big church**"...he says, **a church of two people, so long as they teach and hear the counsel of God, the whole counsel of God and nothing but the Counsel of God, so help them God, has the full blessing of God through the presence of Christ.**

And Christ, when he instituted the Lord's Supper promised his disciples that he would be with them in this holy meal. On the night in which he was betrayed, he supped with them and gave his own body for bread, and his own blood for wine and told them to eat and drink of it often in remembrance of him. Then he says, "**I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.**" Jesus has ascended to heaven, to his Father's kingdom, and from there, every Lord's Supper he again gives his body for bread and his blood for wine, and he sups with us. Though absent from our sight, he is present according to his Word.

Finally, from a mountain in Galilee, the risen though not yet ascended Jesus speaks to his disciples the words of the great commission. He tells his disciples how to make more disciples. He says, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit teaching them all that I have commanded you...*and lo I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.*"** Though Jesus has been lifted up and taken from our sight, he is with us in our faith. He has promised that he will be with us until the end of the age, that is, until he comes again on that final day...a day of Judgment and wrath for the wicked, a day of vindication and deliverance for those who believe and have put on Christ their redeemer.

Christ says, gather in my Name, according to my Word, and I will be with you. He says, **eat and drink and I will be with you**. He says **baptize and teach and I will be with you**. All this to say, he will be with you even though you don't see him. False Christ's will come in his name, but you will know them by their fruits, because they will teach false things, they will deny Jesus presence in Holy Communion and in the Water's of Holy Baptism. Fierce wolves are in the world intending to rob Christ of his flock, and **you standing alone are not immune to their charms and empty promises.** But Christ is more powerful than all of them. Remaining in his *uncompromising* word, gathering in his *exclusive* Name, and eating and drinking in his *invisible* kingdom, **he is with you always, right now, and even to the end of the age**.