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Welcome to the New Life Podcast and Ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, www.newlifeithaca.org. Now here's this week's sermon.

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a reading of the Holy Gospel of St. Luke chapter 24, verses 44 through 53. Please stand if you're able.

00:54

Then he said to them, these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them, thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins

01:21

should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

01:49

and they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God. The Gospel of the Lord.

02:04

We human beings have a fascination with outer space and the idea of going to the stars. Some of the people who have done this are some among of our most heroic and respected people. People like Neil Armstrong, who was the first American to orbit the Earth, or Yuri Gagarin, was the first human being, the cosmonaut, to go into outer space.

02:33

And for good reason. We look upon these things with awe and we long for the stars. We long to go to the stars. It's, think, pretty common human desire. This is why we like to watch movies and TV shows, fantasy, science fiction about going to the stars, Star Wars, Star Trek, Battlestar Galactica, etc., etc.

03:01

It's because we have this fascination with the stars and going to the stars. But in our human desire and our human goal to go to the stars, we have not gotten very far at all. fact, we have only moved a tiny little bit. The nearest star is Proxima Centauri. It is 4.2 light years away. Now 4.2 light years may not sound like a big number, but...

03:30

In terms of a unit of measure that you probably can grasp, an astronomical unit, an astronomical unit is the distance from the Sun to the Earth, 92 million miles. In terms of that, the nearest star is roughly 260 astronomical units away. 260,000 astronomical units away. That's very far. The farthest any human object has ever made it.

03:59

is Voyager 1 probe. The Voyager 1 probe is the farthest anything that we've ever made or touched has gotten and it is 160, only 160 astronomical units away from us. That's 260,000 that it would need to go to reach the nearest star. At its current speed, which is about 38,000 miles an hour, it would reach the distance of Proxima Centauri in about 75,000 years. We have a very far

04:29

way to go. We have an International Space Station. People that are living in outer space. The space station orbits the Earth at about 250 miles above the surface of the Earth, which in the big scope of thing is not very far at all, but it's the farthest from the center of the Earth that anyone lives. If you want to get a little bit of perspective on just how not very far that is, if we were to have

04:56

12 inch globe like you know you used to have in your classrooms as a kid a 12 inch globe of the earth the height of The space station from the earth would be about half of the width of a dime. That's it That's how far away they are not very far not very far at all if if Going back to this 12 inch globe if we were to have if I was holding that 12 inch globe right here that this is

05:25

From the Earth to the Moon, which is the farthest we've ever gotten, 240,000 miles away, the distance from the Earth to the Moon would be represented by a golf ball somewhere around where Heath is standing right now. That's the distance. 12-inch globe, the farthest we've ever gotten is Heath. So where do you think the representation of Proxima Centauri would be? A distant city? Perhaps across the ocean in a different country, in another continent?

05:57

Well, how about the orbit of Pluto, 3.2 billion miles away? In downtown Ithaca, they have little markers that represent the relative distances from the planets, the sun, the moon, and it's all mapped out in downtown. So all of that we can kind of see in this grid of our downtown in Ithaca. But again, if you want to know how far the closest star is, it would be the orbit of Pluto. We have gotten not very far.

06:26

at all in our goal to reach the stars. And nevertheless, for those of us who have reached out and escaped the atmosphere and even gone further to the moon, they are treated with

much respect and their experiences they describe with great awe and wonder. One of the first missions that was going toward the moon but did not land on the moon, Apollo 8,

06:54

Apollo 8 orbited the moon and as they approached the lunar sunrise, this is back in 1968, as they approached the lunar sunrise and they had the picture of the Earth, you know, seeing the Earth as the lunar sunrise occurred, the commanding officer of the lunar module, Commander Frank Borman, read about half of the first chapter of Genesis, especially the part he accentuated where there was a firmament.

07:24

and the firmament was called heaven. Later on, Borman, who was, I think, a believer, reflected on that time by saying that he had an enormous feeling that there had to be a power greater than any of us, that there was a God, and there was indeed a beginning. People that have experienced even the small reaches of outer space have been filled with this kind of awe.

07:54

when the Apollo 11 mission landed on the moon, Buzz Aldrin was read the riot act because they did not like the fact that a Borman had read Genesis and so he was told he couldn't say anything overtly spiritual. If you didn't know, Buzz Aldrin was a Presbyterian elder and so they warned him not to say anything overtly spiritual but they did allow him to take a little bit of bread and wine

08:20

that were blessed and consecrated at his Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas. And so before he got out of the lunar module and walked on the surface of the moon, he ate the bread and drank the wine and had communion on the surface of the moon. The Apollo 14 mission deposited a microform chip that contained the entirety of the Bible and the King James Version. And then one of the last people that walked on the moon, astronaut James Irwin,

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spoke in reverence of his experience of moving further and further away from the earth and seeing the earth smaller and smaller in the window. He said later, seeing this has to change a man. It has to make a man appreciate the creation of God and the love of God. Later, Erwin would become a pastor and reflecting on his experience walking on the moon, he said, I felt the power of God as I've never...

09:20

felt it before. John Glenn was not allowed to go back into space after his first time orbiting the earth. became an American hero, it was deemed too strategically important to send him back out in case he might die. So they didn't let him go back out into space. He only had that one space flight until 1998 when he was 77 years old.

09:46

He rode on the space shuttle Discovery and went back into space, the oldest human who's ever gone into space, at least up until that point. I'm sure we'll surpass that at some point, probably pretty soon. But when he went back out into space aboard the shuttle Discovery, he said this. He said, to look out at this kind of creation and not believe in God is to me impossible. It just strengthens my faith. I wish there were words to describe what it's like.

10:14

There was an early pilot who never even came close to coming to space. This was written about in the 1940s, but this pilot was a poet. And he wrote these famous words. Maybe you've heard them before. Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings. Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth. And he closed with this. And while with silent lifting mind I've trod.

10:43

the high, untrespassable sanctity of space put out my hand and touched the face of God. Such are the ways that people speak, who have experienced just the small distances that we as humanity have gone, and such awe and wonder and reverence that we give to those humans who have done this. I would gather if we were to have an astronaut, if you were to

meet an astronaut, if one of us was able to meet somebody like Buzz Aldrin or Neil Armstrong or John Glenn,

11:12

We would have a great deal of respect and admiration for that person. And so my question is this. We've only made it a tiny little bit in our way and our effort to go to the stars. If we experience such awe and reverence at what we have seen and going just a little bit, and we treat with such honor the people that have gone there, how much more for the man who has passed through the heavens? How much more honor?

11:41

and worship even is due to the person who was passed through the heavens. Maybe it is relative to the admiration that we would give someone who has gone the relative distance from me to Heath, understanding the great distance from us to Pluto. Maybe that is a ratio that we can wrap our head around. Today we come to the ascension of Jesus. And the ascension of Jesus that we read about in this text

12:10

I think the Ascension of Jesus is one of the lesser appreciated stories about Jesus' life. I think it's one of the most underrated holidays. In fact, I've talked about this before. know, lots of people celebrate Christmas. They have Christmas trees, they do gifts, we have Santa Claus. Almost everybody celebrates Christmas. People celebrate Easter too. We have Easter bunnies, we have Easter eggs, and lots of people do those sorts of things. But people don't really celebrate Ascension Day.

12:39

Have you ever been invited to Ascension Day party? I said this a couple years ago when I gave my first Ascension Day sermon here at New Life. said, has anyone ever gotten an Ascension Day greeting card? And then a few days later, I got one in the mail. Abigail Williamson made by hand an Ascension Day greeting card and drew

13:02

it out with her hand and send it to me. But I would guess that I'm the only person in the room who's ever gotten an Ascension Day greeting card. Why is it that we don't emphasize this holiday? Well, I think it's because the nature of it, the implications of the fact that a human being has passed through the heavens and sits at the right hand of God, the implications are so great that they're hard to really reckon with. Because if this is true,

13:32

If it is true that this man did this, this man Jesus Christ, then isn't he due our honor, our reverence, our obedience, and indeed our worship? Today we're going to cover three points. I'm going to draw three points about the

13:51

Ascension of Jesus and what it means for us. I don't know if you've thought about this much at all. If you thought about the implications of the ascension and what it means for us. But I'm gonna pull out three things today. The first is this Christ has ascended into heaven and in Christ we have ascended into heaven. The story is fairly straightforward. We read this story in Luke chapter 24. We read it again in Acts chapter 1 there are lots of

14:20

parts of the New Testament that refer to the ascension of Jesus Christ into the heavens. Maybe you think that this is a bit of a fanciful tale and I will acknowledge that the human being flying through the heavens is a little bit far-fetched. We also believe that God became incarnate by a virgin and was made man. We believe that about Jesus. We believe Jesus was crucified on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead.

14:46

I don't think it is that much more far-fetched to believe that God by His power lifted Christ, His Son, in His sent into heaven. And is it the case that Christ literally flew past the stars? I don't know. The text doesn't say. Is it the case that He lifted up in the sky and passed through into another alternate parallel universe or something like that that exists all around us? Maybe. We don't know.

15:15

There's some sense in which Christ though is lifted up and passes through the heavens, whether it's the heavenly firmament, which represents the transition from earth into heaven, or what. But we know that heaven is a place. It is a physical place, at least according to how the Bible describes it. There are people there. Jesus in his humanity is there. And of course the souls of the faithful are there as well. So heaven is a physical place. So it's not just a spiritual realm. How is that?

15:45

I don't know, the Bible doesn't say. But Christ ascended there, wherever that is. And He ascended and passed through the heavens and now is seated at the right hand of God the Father. Now one of the implications of this, as we've already mentioned, is that this speaks to the dignity of our humanity. The fact that a human being is seated at the right hand of the Father who has ascended into heaven speaks to the elevation of our

16:14

mortal flesh to the immortal. This is in essence what St. Augustine was saying in the quote I read to you earlier. The fact that our humanity has been lifted up and seated with him, who would not rejoice at this? That a human being is seated at the right hand of God. John Calvin said it a different way. He said the ascension means that heaven is not merely a future hope, but a present possession of the church.

16:43

in Jesus Christ. He has ascended into heaven. He sits at the right hand of the Father. And that means that our humanity has great worth and dignity because of that ascension. It is true that every human being is made in the image of God, and the Bible says that it is bestowed crown of glory and honor. But for those of us who are in Christ, that honor and dignity is magnified by the fact that one of our own that we are in union with is seated

17:12

at the right hand of God and so he has ascended and so have we. Now this is where it gets even harder to understand and comprehend because the scriptures are clear that because we are united to Christ through our faith, through our baptism, because we are one with him we have also ascended. We have also ascended. I want to read to you just a few scriptures. This is from Ephesians chapter 1.

17:41

This is what it says, having the eyes of our hearts enlightened. This is Paul in Ephesians chapter 1, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you. What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints? And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe? According to the working of his great might. So here Paul is talking about immeasurable power and great might. And what is that? The power that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and when he seated

18:11

Him at the right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion." And then Paul moves on in chapter 2 to say this, in chapter 2 verse 6, we'll start in verse 4, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved, and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him,

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in the heavenly places, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." We have ascended with him. This is Paul's claim, and it is very hard to believe. It's one of the mysteries of our faith, that because we're united with Christ, we are lifted up with him, and we are raised up with him. We also have ascended into heaven. You know, this is repeated.

19:09

over in chapter 4 of Ephesians and that's the part that we read today. Paul says that there is one body and one spirit just as you were called and he talks about there's one faith, one God, and one baptism but grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of

Christ's gift therefore it says when he ascended on high he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men.

19:38

And when he ascended, what does it mean? But that he had also descended into the lower regions of the earth. So Christ has ascended and we have ascended too. In Hebrews chapter 4, it says this, and I'm going to come back to this. I'm going to come back to this, but it talks about in verse 14, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus Christ the son of God, let us hold fast to our confession for we do not

20:07

have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. And then it says, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace. So the Bible is clear, we have ascended with him. And what are the implications of that? Well, I'm going to talk about that in the second point. But one of the implications is that we get to experience God directly. You know, when we, in our liturgy every week, we have this part, and we're going to do this in a few moments.

20:35

We have this part where we say, up your hearts. And the answer is we lift them up to the Lord. And then after that we sing, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. And why do we do that? Because we believe and the church has taught that when we worship together, when we assemble in worship, we are lifted up by the power of spirit into heaven. This is what the Protestant reformer John Calvin taught. And he, when he described the theology of the Lord's Supper and how it is that Christ is present with us

21:05

in the Lord's Supper. He said it's not that Christ comes down but that we go up. In this he was leaning into the theology of the ancient church. He said when we worship, when we gather together we are lifted up by the power of the Spirit which is able, he said, to cross immeasurable distances. He thought of it in terms of distances. We may think of it in terms of parallel universes. It's beside the point. The power of the Spirit enables us to enter into

21:32

the presence of God in heaven and that's why we say lift up our hearts and that's why we say holy holy holy because that is the song that is continually being sung in heaven.

21:44

Christ has ascended into heaven and so have we. The second point is this, Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and therefore in him we have access to God the Father. This gets to the implications of the ascension and what it means for us that Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God.

22:11

In Psalm 110 it says this, the Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. When Peter preached at Pentecost, he quoted this song and said this, this Jesus God raised up that we are all witnesses, being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Spirit, he has poured out this that yourselves are seeing and hearing.

22:40

For David did not ascend into the heavens. That's who wrote Psalm 110. David did not send into the heavens, but he himself says, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ. So that is Lord of the Hebrew people, but also of the cosmos. Lord is a term that refers to the cosmic Lord. Lord and Christ.

23:10

This Jesus whom you crucified. Jesus sits at the right hand of God, therefore he has all rule and power and dominion. He rules and reigns over all things. He is the King of the universe now. And he is in the process of making all things new. But one of the things that is the implication of that is that we have access to God the Father through him. Because Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father,

23:39

and because we are ascended into heaven with him, we have access, direct access to God the Father. The scriptures are very clear about this, and let's go back to Hebrews chapter 3 verse 5. The fact that Jesus Christ, we have this great high priest who passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, this is Hebrews 4 15, it says, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy

24:08

and find grace to help in the time of need. How is it that we can with confidence draw near to the throne of grace? The reason is because we have access to God the Father through Jesus Christ. Paul says this in Ephesians chapter 3. He talks about how we have access to the Father.

24:35

This is what it says, Ephesians 3, 8-12. He says, me though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things. And what is that plan? That the church, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

25:03

This was according to the eternal purpose that he is realizing Christ our Lord in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. Because Christ sits at the right hand of the Father, we have access to God the Father through him. Paul says this again in Romans 5 verses 1 and 2. He says, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and through him we have obtained access

25:33

by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. As Calvin said, the ascension means that heaven is not just a future hope but a present possession for us. We have access to God the Father through Jesus Christ. There is no other mediator that we need. And it's not as if... I want you to think about how this affects your prayer life.

26:00

Just think about it for a second. How would this affect the way you pray? To know that you have direct access to God the Father through Jesus Christ. When we pray, it's not as if we put a message in a bottle and put it into the deep blue sea and hope by chance it'll reach someone. No. When you pray, it is like you have a direct line to the Father. Now, this may be a dated notion, but before there were cell phones, there were landlines. We still have some landlines, and I think these still exist. There were hotlines that would go directly to the President. Red phone.

26:30

Maybe you've seen it in old movies. Hotline, directly to him. You pick it up and you talk to him. He's the only one. This is what we have. We have direct access to God the Father through Jesus Christ. When I was growing up, we used to sing this song. It was called Jesus on the Main Line Now. And this is how the verse went. Call him up, call him up, tell him what you want. Call him up, call him up, tell him what you want. Call him up, call him up, tell him what you want.

26:58

Jesus on the main line now and we sing that over and over and over and it's true You have direct access to God the Father your prayers are not floating around in space on the off chance They might reach him know they go directly to him. How might that affect the way we pray? To know that we are in the presence of God How might that affect the frequency of our prayer? The the awe that we have when we pray when we come together when we have our prayer time It's not just expressing wishes. We have direct access to

27:27

to God the Father through Jesus Christ because He is seated at the right hand. We have access to God the Father through Jesus Christ. The third point is this. Jesus Christ has the victory in His ascension and so we have the victory in His ascension. In union with Christ, we share in this victory that He has. As Peter already said in this sermon,

27:54

And as he quoted Psalm 110, the Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. And then he proclaimed that this Jesus Christ, who God had raised from the dead, has made both Lord and Christ. He has the victory. Jesus Christ is victorious over death, over hell, and the grave. We've talked about this a lot. And if you've been around a Christian church, you've probably heard this. But did you know?

28:25

that this means we have the victory. The conclusion, the conclusion of 1 Corinthians 15, we talked about last week in the sermon, how this means your labor is not in vain. But the verse just before it, just before it, in 1 Corinthians 15, 57, of this great chapter on how Christ rose from the dead and so will we, is, thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are victorious.

28:54

Because he is victorious. It's fun to be victorious. Those of us who have played sports, who are fans of sporting teams, we know how fun victory is. Some of us live and die by the performance of our teams, right? And if we achieve some victory, it's elation. If we get to experience ourselves as athletes competing, it's wonderful. But even if you're not into sports, there's some...

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aspect of your career, the things you are interested in, it's the arts, you know, there are awards that are given, there are Emmys, are Oscars, there are Nobel Prizes. Just think of the heights of whatever it is that your profession is and the things that you're interested in. There's something like this. There's victory. And when you experience it, it is one of the best feelings that you ever have. The Bible says that we have the victory. We have it right now.

29:51

Because Christ is ascended into heaven. He is victorious. And so are we. Jesus Christ is the King of the entire universe. He is the Lord of all. He is ascended into heaven and He has the victory. So He is Lord. The government is not Lord. Jesus is Lord. The most powerful corporations are not Lord. Jesus is Lord. You are not Lord. Your feelings are not Lord. Your doubts and fears are not Lord.

30:21

Jesus is Lord. This is why we can rejoice in our own weaknesses. This is why we can cast our cares on Him. This is why we can boast in the Lord. This is why we are not to worry. This is why you can place your complete trust in all areas of your life in Jesus Christ because He is Lord of everything.

30:43

Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper said, is not one square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine. Every square inch is under the Lordship of Christ, and the beautiful good news is that in Christ we have, we share in His victory. Jesus Christ is the victorious King.

31:12

And so you are victorious. You are victorious over your circumstances. You are victorious over your hurts. You are victorious over your pain. You are victorious over your uncertainties. You are victorious over your fears. You are victorious over your doubts, your temptations, your sins. You are victorious over your depression. You are victorious over the uncertainty that you feel about your family.

31:40

You are victorious over our city. You are victorious not just in the church, but in respect to every human institution because Jesus is Lord. Jesus is victorious and in Him we are victorious. Jesus Christ has defeated death. Death has no more dominion over you. He has

defeated hell. Hell need no more be a worry for you. He has defeated the grave. The grave will not hold you.

32:08

He has defeated the devil. The devil can do nothing to hurt you. Jesus Christ has ascended into the highest heaven in the fullness of his humanity. He is a human man and he rules and reigns over all things. Believe in him, put your trust in him, and let him be Lord over your entire life and being. Hold nothing from him. Hide nothing from him. Keep nothing from him. Because he...

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there's more. Let's pray. Thank you for listening to this week's podcast. Please rate and review us on your podcast service and share with anyone who may be interested. The intro and outro music for the New Life podcast is provided by Sandra McCracken with her permission. Please visit her website at sandramcracken.com. We'll see you next week.