

One of the great things about kids is their sense of imagination and wonder. When they play, they play the parts of superheroes and soldiers, kings and queens and pro athletes. And in their minds, at least for a little while, that's what they become. That's how it is with children, they think about possibilities, and the sky's the limit.

But, as we get older, reality starts to set in. 'Maybe I'm *not* going to be a superhero after all. And the odds that I'll play for the Vikings, the Twins, or the Timberwolves look pretty slim.' You climb up the professional ladder, and then, one day, you come to see that you've gone as high as you're gonna get, and from that point on, you do your best just to hang on.

The same goes for health. You grow for a while in height and in strength, (that's one of the perks of being a teen-ager!) but then as the years go by it becomes a matter of *maintenance*, and you start looking good . . . for your age. So it seems the further along you get in life, the less you think about success, and the more you just gear yourself for survival.

Now, not all of this is bad. Because with age and time comes *wisdom*. And, along the way, people find out that it doesn't really matter if you

become king of the hill or the greatest in the world. You come to see that the best things in this life are simple gifts— friends, family, church. There's no need for a fancy feast or a million-dollar home. A simple meal among loved ones will do just fine. Thanks be to God for the simple gifts.

But that having been said, we should *never* completely lose that childlike sense of adventure and wonder. There are opportunities all around us. Whether as individuals or as a church, we can remember that, even if we've gone off in the wrong direction in life, we can always make a U-turn. And, on the other hand, there's no reason to rest on our laurels or think a glorious past is our peak; that's because a brighter future is definitely in front of us. Doors are opening all around us. And no matter what happens, better things are on the way.

Now, don't get me wrong. As Lutherans, we don't harbor any illusions. Human nature, on this side of the grave, is never going to improve. It doesn't matter how many laws we pass or how many self-improvement books we read. When we look at ourselves in the mirror of God's holy Law, we are painfully aware that original sin remains with us. The good that we want to do, we don't do, and that which we don't want to do, that we

end up doing (See Romans 7). It's frustrating.

But there is hope. And *that's* what the celebration of the Ascension is all about. It's the day we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ has risen into heaven and has been crowned the King of kings.

Well, "Why is that such a big deal?" You might wonder, "I mean, Jesus is the Son of God. Of course, He's the King."

But, today as we observe the Ascension of our Lord, we remember that the One who rules is one of *us*. Our Brother, a man from Nazareth, has been promoted. A member of our family has climbed the ladder to the top. Somebody who knows our sorrows, our frustrations, and our temptations now sits enthroned at the right hand of God.

And that fact bodes very well for our future. You could say that now, we're *insiders*. It's like being a worker in a company that your uncle happens to own. It's like being the coach's kid. Call it an unfair advantage if you want, but a man, who happens to be our best Friend, rules in heavenly glory. He's made it to the top and has every intention of bringing us along with Him.

One of my favorite children's stories is The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe by C. S. Lewis. Perhaps you have read the book or seen the movie. In fairy-tale fashion,

Lewis tells the story of our salvation. The ruler of Narnia, a majestic Lion, laid down his life to break the deep magic. In the end, Narnia is restored, and four children are crowned and seated on thrones of the kingdom. (pause) When you think about it, *we* are those children. We are destined to rule.

The Bible contains several sad stories in addition to many uplifting ones, but the most tragic story of all comes right at the beginning. And it isn't a story about a plague or murder or exile or wandering. Rather, it's one simple act of disobedience. Adam and Eve had it all. They were the king and queen of all creation. They had dominion over the earth. And then, they fell. And when they fell, it was like falling off a cliff. And they kept falling down, down, and farther down. Made in God's image, man came to worship images in the forms of men, beasts, and birds.

And so it is—sin has brought down the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve, as C.S. Lewis would put it. Sin has made us trivial. When we put others down, we only show just how small-minded we've become. When we take what isn't ours, we show how we have become enslaved to ordinary things that have no real meaning. When we covet and crave, we demonstrate just how empty we are inside. When

we put so much focus on our clothes and appearance, we show how much we have to cover up. When we harm others, we become less like kings and queens and more like petty dictators and cheap thugs.

But today, the Day we observe Jesus' Ascension, we see the **light**. The heavens have opened up. And now, not even the sky is the limit. Because Christ, through His death, has taken our smallness and our pettiness upon Himself. Even though we ignored him, He was devoted to us. Even though we mocked Him, He was big enough to take it. Though we looked down on Him, He lifted us up.

By His resurrection, He has restored our fallen race. And by His ascension into heaven, He gives us a glimpse of our future glory, apart from sin and its ugliness. He shows us life where hard hearts become soft and petty people become bighearted.

When you put on your baptismal gown, however many years ago that was, you were **really** fitted for royal garments. And, on your confirmation day, as you wore that white gown (like the 8<sup>th</sup> graders did two Sundays ago), you were having another dress rehearsal for the glory that awaits.

Once our sin made us lower than the beasts, but now, even the angels envy us. So, pity the world's powers. Feel bad for all the celebrities who

don't know what we know. They strut around, not knowing that they're just playing dress up. Meanwhile, **we're** in line for a promotion that makes theirs seem like child's play. Since our Lord wore a crown of thorns, **we** will wear the crown of life.

Go ahead and embrace the future. Like a child, consider the possibilities. Open the doors and walk through. And know that our Lord has great plans for you just as He has great plans for First Lutheran. **We have** a friend in Jesus. And because Jesus ascended into the highest heaven, **we** will too. Better things are definitely on the way. Amen.