



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Minnesota South District

... cultivating leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God

May 13, 2021 – Ascension Day

“And 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. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.”

Luke 24:50-53 (ESV)

Dear Brothers in Office,

It's always a challenge to be a good news man in a bad news world. I'm privy to the burdens of many of you, so I'm pretty sure that whoever you are and wherever you minister, you have more than your share of concerns to contend with.

Few if any thrive in a chaotic environment, and that's the case most everywhere we look these days. No matter their personal views on the virus and its fallout, parishioners have grown weary of the whole thing. Frequently, they take out their frustrations on each other—and their pastors. Then there's the challenge of figuring out what the “new normal” looks like—and how to return to it.

Meanwhile, our social fabric is torn by strife. Long festering racial tensions and wounds from injustices past and present erupt in civil unrest. Familiar cultural patterns are undermined by destructive ideologies that divorce sex from gender and redefine marriage and the family. Classic teachings of Christian faith and morality are deemed oppressive, and those who advocate them are called haters and bigots.

Brothers, it's never been easy to be a shepherd of souls, but these current days can be especially discouraging. I urge you to recall who you are and whose you are. You have been chosen by our gracious God to be His very own through the shed blood of His beloved Son. You were marked with His redeeming cross on your forehead and heart when you were buried with Him by baptism into death and raised with Him into His victorious resurrection. There is now nothing in all creation that can ever separate you and Jesus. He lives in you as you live in Him, and He will not let you go. You are His very own servant, simultaneously a steward of the mysteries of God.

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus led His apostles out as far as Bethany and—in the very act of blessing them—He vanished from their sight, being taken up into heaven. I remind you, beloved brothers, that the Ascension of Jesus is not merely a doctrine but a glorious reality. Now we have the immeasurable honor of doing His work on earth in partnership with Him. We equip our people to be voices of reason and reconciliation in a world of discord and enmity. We speak peace to burdened sinners and wounded hearts in

Jesus' name. All of this—and more—is ours to give since we have received these wondrous gifts from our risen and ascended Lord.

Even more, right now, as surely as I am writing to you this very moment, there is a man sitting at the right hand of the Father, with flesh and blood just like yours and mine. Though He is also God from God and Light from Light, He is a human being just like you and me. He is a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief, Scripture says. Tempted in every way as we are, He always lives to make intercession for us all. The Word which you preach and the Sacraments which you administer are the signs and seals of His redemption for burdened hearts and souls, including yours.

The Ascension of Jesus reminds us that His human nature is no longer limited by time and space. He ascended up on high that He might fill all things with His presence (Ephesians 4:10). When He says, "Behold, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20), He means exactly what He says.

Let this promise be your consolation and your comfort in these troubling days and always.

Your pastor and brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford