

When we left Holland last Saturday my cousins were excited about the coming week. They were going to spend two free days working in the garden and lounging around with family. It was going to be Hemelvaarts Dag - a national Holiday. No they do not celebrate Memorial Day the last weekend of May. Always on Thursday, 40 days after Easter, the whole country shuts down to celebrate Hemelvaarts Dag. Hemelvaart means Heaven journey Day. A day they used to remember Jesus journey into heaven – his ascension. His exaltation into the throne room – the holy of holies in heaven.

The Dutch excitement of this Holiday is surprising to me. Holland is now one of the most secular countries in the world. Most people have given up the faith, but yet they celebrate Ascension Day. On Friday Margaret Lovell mentioned to me that it is the same in Indonesia. Even though Indonesia is 90% Muslim Ascension day is still a national Holiday.

It is unfortunate, however, that most Christians in North America had no idea that last Thursday was Ascension Day. Jesus ascension is mostly forgotten and unimportant. We, however, belong to a Church that thinks differently. In our Church Order - article 51b it states that in Christian Reformed Churches “worship services shall be held in observance of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day and Pentecost.” We come from a tradition that believes celebrating Ascension Day and Pentecost is equal to Christmas and Easter. These events are as essential in understanding the life and meaning of Christ.

You see what Jesus did in the past is very important. His teachings, his death, his resurrection are all essential to our faith and our salvation. But where Jesus is today and what he is doing today, and what he will do in the future is of equal importance for his disciples.

On Ascension Day Jesus gave the church its mission statement. You who believe in me, Jesus said, you who are my disciples will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Go - make disciples of all nations. As God has sent me into the world so I am sending you.” This is an amazing impossible mandate Jesus gave us.

Jesus ascends into heaven so that he can minister in the oval office of the universe, in the holy of Holies in heaven. And from there he sends us, his disciples and the church, the Holy Spirit. It is because Jesus ascended into Heaven that we are baptized with the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. Power to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, and to make disciples of all nations, .

In the Holy Holies in heaven where Jesus now ministers, there are seven lampstands before the throne of God. In the manmade version of God's House – the tabernacle made by Moses according to God's instructions, there was one lampstand in the inner room of the tent of meeting. This lampstand was a large menorah with seven branches. And it was the High Priest's job to keep the lamps burning continually. Leviticus 24 says the pure gold lampstand before the Lord must be kept burning and tended continually - 24-7. It must never go out. Later, one of the prophets in Israel tells us the significance of the Lamps in the Holy of Holies. Zechariah 4 says the Lampstand and its sevenfold light are the Word of God and the flames on the lampstand are the eyes of God. In Revelation 1:4 John suggests that the flames on the lampstand are the seven spirits of God.

On Ascension Day Jesus was lifted up into that heavenly Holy of Holies and as the high priest, he is tending the Lamps before the throne of God. Jesus is the Lampstand. He is the light of the world, He is the Word of God in human form, He is the eyes and the spirit of God. And what is so amazing about that vision in revelation 1 is that there are now seven golden lampstands. And in this vision Jesus explains the seven Golden lampstands in heaven are now the churches. The churches now function as the word of God in the world, they function as the eyes of God and the spirit of God.

Through Jesus death and resurrection he went into the Father's house to prepare a place for us according to John 14. The Churches after the ascension have a place in God's heavenly scheme of things and in his mission. And Jesus job as the ascended high priest and lead pastor in God's house, is to keep the lampstands burning. To keep the fire of the spirit of God alive in the churches, to keep the church functioning as the eyes and heart of God on earth.

And so on Ascension Day Jesus ascends as the custodian of God's candlestick park in heaven. His job is to keep the Word of God alive in the churches, and to keep the flames of the spirit burning in the churches. His job is to keep the presence of God, and the heart of God and the compassion of God and the love of God and the power of God and the gospel of God alive on earth through the ministry of the churches.

In Chapter 11:4 of Revelation the candlesticks/lampstands are referred to as God witnesses on earth. The churches are God's address on earth, and this is what Jesus ascension makes possible. Jesus is the power that keeps the churches alive and vibrant and fruitful and on mission.

Today Jesus as the ascended Lord and pastor of the church, custodian of God's candlestick park, walks among us in word and spirit encouraging us in living the faith. Through the Word and spirit, Jesus is empowering us to be his witnesses. He gives us spiritual gifts to use for the mission of the church. He encourages us when we are down, he lifts us up when we fall. He hears our prayers. And especially he feeds us with the

bread of life and the cup of blessing. When Jesus ascended into heaven he was raised to the right hand of God, the working and the might hand of God to be our help and our strength.

From the vantage point of heaven Jesus knows our every situation, he knows our temptations, he knows our struggles, he knows our doubts, the challenges we face, he knows where we are missing the point. And so in Word and Spirit Jesus comes to us and guides us and encourages us and says “whoever has ears to hear, let them hear what the spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 3: 20 Here I am, says Jesus through the spirit. I stand at the door of your life and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you and you with me. To all those who are victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my father on his throne.

Do you want to have the presence of Jesus in your life? Do you want to be part of a church that is a witness to Jesus? Do you want to hear what the spirit is saying to the churches? Do you want to hear the voice of Jesus and experience eating and fellowshiping with him?

On Ascension Day Jesus said to his disciples then Wait and pray for the gift of God, the Holy Spirit. Do not be afraid of the challenges and struggles or the immensity of the mission. Wait and pray and you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today we are eating and drinking with the risen and ascended Lord - the custodian pastor of the church. We are eating the food and drinking the cup that strengthens us for the mission. We are waiting and praying for the Holy Spirit to encourage us and strengthen us and set us on fire again to be witnesses of Jesus. For he is the ascended Lord.