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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
17 May 2026

Sermon on Ephesians 1:15-23

Worship Theme:

HE LIVES—TO RULE ALL THINGS FOR HIS CHURCH

Without the resurrection of Jesus, we would have to wonder who oversees the world. At times the world seems so chaotic. People claim to be in charge but they have limited power and strange ideas. Many of the ideas are harmful for Christians. Leaders seem to lead without acknowledging Jesus. But Jesus lives, and it makes a difference. Jesus is head over everything for the Church. When Jesus ascended, he took his proper place in heaven. The Festival of the Ascension is one of the oldest and most joyful celebrations in the Christian Church. It will be observed by Christians until Christ returns to take us to be with him.

Sermon Theme: “Incomparably Great Power”

What do you think of when you hear the word “power”? Many things probably come into your mind, some positive, some negative. I asked our school students this same question in chapel on Friday and we talked about all kinds of answers from monster trucks, the Hulk, and screaming voices to electricity, gravity, and the sun. There are a tremendous amount of powers in our world. When these powers benefit us, we are thankful for them. But if they are used against us, it doesn't take very long for us to realize something: we don't have nearly as much power as we like to think.

You know how this goes, right? When you're a kid, you may not have a lot of bodily strength yet, but you hardly ever think about that. You just take on the world, exploring everything, climbing everything, and if anything knocks you down, you bounce right back up and carry on as before. You get into your teens and twenties and you think you know a little more about life now and you feel invincible and unstoppable. You reach middle age and have more wisdom and experience and perhaps physical strength and stamina from a life full of opportunities to grow. And we haven't even touched on the power of figures in authority – presidents, generals, prime ministers, all kinds of rulers and leaders. We all think we have power to take on the world and overcome anything.

That is, until eventually we face something we can't overcome, something which quickly shows us it is more powerful than we are. Something which reminds us we don't have nearly the amount of power we thought we did. Maybe it's an addiction to drugs, alcohol, pornography – an addiction you've tried breaking countless times for many years and it just keeps sinking its claws back into you. Maybe it's cancer or another disease – something which, no matter what you do to fight against it, seems like it's going to claim your life in the end. Maybe it's other people in your life who like to talk down to you, making you feel small and insignificant, as they belittle you and insist that they are better than you. Maybe it's anxiety, depression, or another mental health struggle – something which takes

over your mind and convinces you that you're the problem, or that everything is awful, and even that the world would be a better place without you in it. Maybe you can't seem to catch a break as one thing after another keeps happening to you and there are so many of them now that even things which normally would be smaller and not bother you as much – even those things are now overwhelming and make you feel completely out of control and powerless.

And we haven't even gotten to the root cause of all these things yet, which is sin. Please understand, I'm not saying that everything we've talked about so far is a direct result of sins you have done – that wouldn't be true. Some could be, but some also happen just because we live in a world that has been decimated and broken by disobedience to its Creator. Because of sin's existence, the world is nowhere close to the perfection our Maker gave it in the beginning. And whether it's the sins of our own thoughts, words, and actions, things other people do to us, or things we suffer and face because of this imperfect existence, we all have to deal with them. But no matter how much we struggle and fight against these things, it doesn't take us long to realize the sobering truth that we have so little power of our own. In some cases, we have none at all.

When we reach that point, whatever it is we have faced or are still facing, when we reach the point of being completely emptied of our power and realizing we will not be able to overcome this on our own, we sit down with our head in our hands and simply ask, "How will I ever get out of this?"

In that moment, there are many places we could try looking for comfort and reassurance, but I would like to suggest one you maybe haven't thought of much before: Jesus' Ascension. Today we celebrate Jesus' Ascension and heard accounts of it in our readings from Acts 1 and Luke 24. Jesus defies one of the strongest natural forces in our world – gravity – and simply rises up into the air. We can't do that for more than a few seconds, even if we jump really high! But here's something even more amazing: Jesus physically rising into the sky just might be the least impressive moment of his ascension. I don't mean it is insignificant – not at all. This was hugely important! But the rest of the moments surrounding his ascension demonstrate in an even greater way the power of God.

Take a look again at Ephesians 1. This reading is all about power, and the key phrase is right in the middle: **Incomparably Great Power**. This isn't a mediocre power, a come-and-go power, or a power that doesn't last. This power is great. Incomparably great – nothing at all can come close to it. All the rest of Paul's words here answer three questions: whose power is it, what does it do, and whom does it benefit?

First, it is perfectly clear to see that the power Paul talks about here is God's power. If this power came from anyone or anywhere else, it would not be able to do any of the things it does. But these things have happened, they have been done and accomplished. And so the power must be God's and God's alone.

As we read everything this power has done and continues to do, this truth only becomes more and more clear. This incomparably great power has given us *faith in the Lord Jesus*. We know what we are by nature – we are sinners who are

in complete rebellion against God, people on a one-way street to hell, people who have absolutely no way of personally changing our condition or fate. We are powerless against these enemies. But God is not! God has **incomparably great power**, far beyond whatever power sin and hell can muster. And not only can God overpower them, but he has. He has by taking people out of the clutches of Satan and off the path of eternal damnation, and putting faith into hearts – OUR hearts! Because of the power of God’s Holy Spirit working through God’s powerful Word and sacraments, we have *faith in the Lord Jesus*.

And our faith in Jesus changes everything about our lives. It’s not a decision we made; it’s a gift from God, the gift of an entirely new life. Now we have *love for all God’s people*, reason to keep *giving thanks for you, remembering you in our prayers*. We have the very Word of God more-readily accessible than ever before and can read and study it anytime, anywhere, *so that we may know him better, and that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which he has called us and the riches of his glorious inheritance*.

The more we read those words, the more we recognize what a profound impact this has on us. It is no small claim to say that Jesus has changed everything about us, particularly because sometimes it’s difficult to see. We still suffer from diseases, people may still treat us badly, we still commit our own sins every day. But that’s not what defines us. It is not our identity, or the most powerful part of who we are anymore. Our identity is secure in Christ – we are dearly loved children of God. That will always be higher and more powerful than anything else we say, think, or do, more than any other title or name we may have. Our eternity is secure in Christ, so the world can do to us whatever it wishes – we will not be afraid, we will not be moved, and we will not give up.

And if that sounds too good to be true, as if to say “how can there possibly be such a power that can do so much for me”, read on. Because this incomparably great power has a history of undeniable achievements. *That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead*. Do you see how incredible that is? The power of God which put faith in your heart is the very same power he used when Jesus looked death in the face and said, “I’m done with you now.” It’s the power of Jesus when he went down to hell to proclaim his victory over everything Satan had tried to do. It’s the power of Jesus when he walked out of the grave on Easter morning, ready to tell the world that his mission was successful, that God the Father has accepted his sacrifice in our place, and that sin was atoned for, Satan defeated, and death repurposed from defeat into delivery.

And there’s more! *That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he...seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms*. That’s what we celebrate today! That’s Jesus’ ascension! The day that Jesus’ physical presence in this world was no longer required and he could bodily return to his Father in heaven. Not because he was done watching over and providing for his people, but because he had a better place to do that from again. Jesus will always be present in this world with his people, but when he bodily ascended into heaven, look at why he did! So that he could be *far above all rule and authority, power and dominion*,

*and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed to be head over everything for the church. Jesus didn't ascend to leave us, but to lead us. He has the power to take everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen, and turn it into something eternally good. Jesus is *head over everything*. Nothing and no one will ever be higher or more powerful than he is.*

The best news puts all of this together and reminds us who it's for. The power to overcome sin and unbelief by putting faith in hearts, the power to change everything by giving someone a new life to live as well as an eternal life to look forward to, the power to look death in the face and walk away from it perfectly alive and well, and the power to enter heaven as the victorious Savior who powerfully rules over everything to bring about eternal good – it's all for us. This is his *incomparably great power for us who believe*.

What does this mean? It means whatever age you are, whatever you face in your life, whatever you have done, and whatever has been done to you, there is an **incomparably great power** focused entirely on you. It does not come FROM you; it is the power of God FOR you. And nothing is greater than his power. God loves you. God forgives you. God gives you a life right now that is safe with Christ, and an eternal life that will be safe with him forever. The Risen and Ascended Jesus uses all his **incomparably great power** to care for you today, tomorrow, and forever. Thank you, Jesus, for this incomparable gift! Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.