

June 2, 2019 (ASCENSION SUNDAY – Lay Led Worship)

Acts 1:8-11



We all wear a bunch of different “hats” in life – *do you know what I mean?* I’m not talking about literal hats here; I’m talking about the different roles and responsibilities we all have that are unique to our personal lives. Right now I’m functioning as your lay worship leader and wearing the “Minister Hat” – but I also have a “Husband hat” and a “Father hat” and a “Citizen hat” and so on and so on. You all have your own “hats” that you wear – *mother / father / son / daughter / employer / employee / grandparent / student / farmer / cook / manager / janitor / etc. etc.*

There’s a pile of different hats we all wear in life – but we’re here today because, no matter what our lives may look like, we all have a common hat. **It has JESUS on it.** We are His people; His witnesses. Having the Jesus Hat is a ***mammoth privilege***, and a ***mammoth responsibility***. It’s our job to bring the Good News about Him to the world (*who He is and what he did / how He lived the perfect life for us all / how He suffered and died for us all / how He rose again and opened heaven for us all – everything the WORD tells us about Him*). We KNOW Him and it’s our privilege and responsibility to show HIM to the world.

Today we’re celebrating Jesus’ **Ascension** into heaven that took place 40 days after He rose from the dead on Easter Sunday. He appeared in person, alive, as Himself to hundreds of witnesses over that period, and many of them were standing there in that place when he was taken up into heaven. Those people received the same hats we have. They we’re standing around wondering, “*What now?!*” and Jesus handed out to the crowd these **HATS (Jesus’ Witness Hats)**. “*Here – YOU are my witnesses – go tell the world what you’ve seen and heard! Tell them about me that they might believe as well. Then I’ll return again.*”

Our sermon text for ASCENSION takes us back to when it happened, recorded for us in **Acts 1:8-11** (EHV):

8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

9 After he said these things, he was taken up while they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 They were looking intently into the sky as he went away. Suddenly, two men in white clothes stood beside them. 11 They said, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been

taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Part of what makes Ascension such a big day for Christians is that it’s the beginning of a whole new period in the world’s history. Jesus Christ is God in human flesh and the Savior of the world. He’s the Lamb of God who died to remove our guilt and rose to open heaven for us all. He is the **DIVIDING FACTOR** for all of human history.

From the time when the world was new and human beings fell into sin and God first promised to send a Savior – ALL through Old Testament history – God’s people we’re looking *forward* to HIS coming. Then He came. God’s people welcomed him and witnessed his miracles and heard his teachings and knew of his grizzly, torturous death, and saw him alive after Easter *THEN . . .* at the ASCENSION a **new period** of human history began (known as the New Testament age) from His going up to His coming down again in glory and judgment. During THIS time God’s people wear this “**Jesus Hat**”. They look *back* to what He did and tell the world about him.

The time of looking ahead to His coming lasted roughly 4000 years – the time of His redemptive work was merely 33 years – how long will the period of history we live in last? *Who knows. No one knows.* It seemed that God’s people back then felt it would be rather short, judging by their zeal and energy in spreading the Good News and some of the things mentioned in the New Testament.

Jesus said it wasn’t for them to know the dates or times. (Acts 1:7) God knows what information we need, and what information would be harmful to us. A **date for the End** would be disastrous. We can see that. Those who try to pick it are wasting their time. It also wouldn’t have been good for THEM if God said: “*I have souls in my family that won’t be conceived for 2000 years – I must wait for them as well.*” Knowing how people are, they might think: “*Oh, well – then I guess we’ve got lots of time. We can worry about other stuff.*” If they ***didn’t take this “hat” seriously - we (and MANY others) wouldn’t have the Gospel.*** Thankfully they took it VERY seriously. Read through the book of **Acts** and you can see that. God’s people wearing “His hat” is what He uses to rescue more souls and spread the Saving Truth.

That’s a big **RESPONSIBILITY**. **Responsibility** changes things. It makes people grow up and challenges them to do and be more than they thought they could.

Imagine 2 couples. Both young newly-weds in their mid twenties. “**Couple A**” and “**Couple B**” do lots of things together. They go out to nice restaurants. They see movies. They stay out late. They go on vacations together; just the 4 of them.

Then **couple A** gets pregnant and has a BABY. They get new “hats”. A “*Mom hat*” and a “*Dad hat*”. That child is a gift and they couldn’t imagine life without their little one. But – things are simply different now. **Couple B** is now frustrated. **Couple A** isn’t going on that cruise with them now. They can’t afford the nice restaurants because of all the expenses they now have. They don’t stay out late anymore – they’re parents. They got NEW HATS and they take that seriously – *as they should*. YES, it requires sacrifice, but it’s worth it and **couple A** embraces that.

When we came to faith and were **baptized** in the Name of our Triune God – we got this “**Jesus Hat**.” True, much of the world has never had this or has lost it – but we have it. We consider having Jesus having the greatest GIFT God can give and as God’s people we embrace the RESPONSIBILITY that comes along with it.

The embarrassing thing is how drastically we **shirk the responsibility** that comes with being Jesus’ witnesses.

- **Couple A** wouldn’t leave on a vacation and leave their child behind and alone at home. But sometimes we leave on vacation and leave our Jesus Hat in the closet and our Bible collecting dust on the shelf. **Couple A** wouldn’t take the summer off from being parents – *they can’t do that!* But we sometimes think we can take a vacation from our Savior and assume that’s somehow OK.
- **Couple A** wouldn’t try to HIDE the fact that they’re parents now so they can do everything they used to with **Couple B**. But we sometimes try to hide our “Jesus Hat” so we can pretend we’re just like those who don’t know Him and go along with the crowd. Often we’d rather “fit in” than we would embrace the responsibility God has given us.
- **Couple A** wouldn’t neglect to feed and change and take care of their child – but – WE neglect our faith by not feeding and nourishing our souls with God’s Word and worship and devotional time.

SOCIAL SERVICES can remove a child from a home if there’s serious neglect and put that child with someone more responsible. **God** can remove the “Jesus Hat” if there’s serious neglect and give it to someone who will wear it and embrace the responsibility of it.

Sometimes I wonder why He hasn’t taken this “Hat” away from me. *Do you?* He has every right to; doesn’t He?

The only reason He doesn’t take it away from us is because of the Name **on that hat**. Thanks to JESUS, we don’t get what we deserve. Thanks to Jesus we get a Heavenly Father that is kind / forgiving / gracious / and merciful to us because of what His Son did for us. Jesus died for us and He smiles upon us and He puts His Name on us and He declares us forgiven and calls us worthy to hold this awesome privilege of being His people.

Why us??? All we can say is that it’s GRACE. It’s God’s gift to us that we know Him and trust Him and have Him in our hearts.

Just as parents are **overwhelmed** to see the miracle of their child that God has given them – be **overwhelmed** to see the miracle of Jesus that God has given us. What a privilege to have sins forgiven. What a privilege to have a purpose for life that’s higher than we can imagine. What a privilege to have eternal life to look forward to - and all because God wanted to grant us this gift.

When we get the JESUS HAT – **things change!** People see it. God *wants* people to see it. We know what it looks like when a mom is wearing her “mom hat”. We know what it looks like when an employee is fulfilling his/her responsibilities at work. We know what it looks like when a student is studying for a test. And – we can see it when God’s people are wearing this **Jesus’ Witness Hat**.

- We see it on when they go out of their way to worship and spend time with Him and know Him better and strengthen their bond with Him through the Word and sacraments.
- We see it on them because that “hat” grants them **superhuman abilities** to love unconditionally / to forgive without strings attached / to serve expecting nothing in return / to sacrifice their time and money for the sake of sharing Jesus with the lost – the HAT allows and empowers them to do these things. It grants them strength to speak up and face the embarrassment so they can share what they know and believe about Jesus with someone else.
- We see it when we see God’s people living their faith boldly and clearly wearing this hat while **all the other hats of life come and go**.

Enjoy and **embrace** this HUGE gift and serious responsibility!! God has made you His very own. Jesus has *visibly* ascended to heaven and won’t come back *visibly* until this period of the world’s history is over. But until that time He’s promised us His presence and His power right up to the End, so that we can be His WITNESSES.

All of human history revolves around Jesus and He knows YOU and you know HIM and He’s given you and me the exciting task of being His witnesses until He comes again in a visible way to begin that last period of human history – **from His glorious return . . . off to eternity**.