

The Ascension - 2022

Acts 1:1-11; Ps 46; Ephesians 1:17-23; Luke 24:46-53

Today the Easter promise of the Resurrection is completed. Pentecost is still to come with the life of the Holy Spirit, but Ascension reveals the purpose of our life.

By taking up the human flesh, Jesus shows us how our own life's meaning is to be understood. Through his teaching and healing ministry he shows how we can be transformed with his Love. By his dying and rising he transforms our understanding of God's desire for what he wants for us: eternal life. By his Ascension he shows that this eternal life encompasses all our humanity as it should be: renewed and revitalised, transformed and yet human. It is this human form that Jesus Christ ascended to Heaven with, where he remains and beckons to us.¹

We are not just being offered the opportunity to outwit the death of our bodies: our Faith is that we are being offered a chance to really live as we were created for: transformed body and soul.

The Prayer after Communion today (tomorrow morning) says this; '*Grant, we pray, that Christian hope may draw us onward to where our nature is united with you.*'² By his Incarnation the Son of God united his divinity with our humanity for ever, through his Ascension Jesus offers us the gift of uniting our humanity with his divinity for ever.

It dismays me when I hear people, sometimes even Christians, put Jesus into a group of other founders of faiths or good people or wise people. He was not like Muhammad who united a people and waged war. He was not like the Buddha who sought oneness with the person-less creator. He was not like Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, or

Confucius or the Dali Lama. He is not remotely like them. He is God. If they are truly good and holy people, then they are on the way to becoming like Him.

He is both mesmerising and outrageous. He is mesmerising because of his teaching and care and otherworldliness. He is outrageous because he saw what was in other people's hearts and presented them with their reflection. He knew when people were dead to God's word - dead to Him – and he showed them and they did not like it. So, they took his life so that he would not remind them of just how dead *they* were, even though they still breathed and ate and reproduced.

Then, entirely unexpectedly, Jesus was raised from the dead and there was Joy. But he did not just come back to life as had Lazarus: he was transformed. He was the same Jesus: he , talked, has his memories and could eat and be touched, and crucially I think, for us he still bore his wounds, but he was transformed. And then he ascended into heaven to be with the One who sent him, the same God the Father who now called him home.

And so, I conclude as I began. Our purpose is this: we are called to be perfectly united with God as human beings, in body and in Spirit. God did not create us so that he could strip us of what makes us human, but so that we could offer it back to Him for Him to redeem made Holy, a different type of humanity but still humanity. We are the seed. We will die. We are offered the opportunity to be-reborn into a heavenly being. This is the Resurrection miracle of Easter fulfilled this Day of Ascension.

¹ 1 John 2:1

² Roman Missal, Prayer after Communion p. 472