

Seventeenth Station: The Ascension

Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

All Those who believe in him shall never die. Alleluia.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This', he said, 'is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.' *Acts 1.3-11*

Reflection

If we build a rocket fast enough- will we ever find Christ waiting for us at the edges of time and space? As we celebrate the Ascension, we look naturally to the heavens- and we may well imagine Christ to be up there somewhere in the sky. Perhaps sitting on a cloud or riding on the tail of a comet, God beyond the stars. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury said: The ascension of Christ is his liberation from all restrictions of time and space. It does not represent his removal from the earth, but his *constant* presence everywhere on earth.

The Ascension *defies* human logic and science, Christ departs from us physically, so that he may be present with us for all eternity. *I am with you always*, says the risen Christ to his disciples- until the end of the age.

Why do you stand looking up towards heaven? Ask two men in white robes who appear beside the disciples in Luke's account of the Ascension in the Acts of the Apostles. This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come, in the same way that you saw him go into heaven. There is a tantalizing clue that this is not the end - that there will be another chapter in the story of salvation. Christ does not leave us as orphans.

The Ascension does not represent Christ disappearing out of our lives- it is an event which weaves together his life, death and resurrection into our earthbound humanity and Christian vocation. The work of God in Christ, was never about creating a heavenly home for himself beyond our reach. +

To grasp something of the meaning of the Ascension, we must return to the incarnation -we must hold on to Jesus feet as he rises. It is no longer God up above and we down below, but a deifying of all that is



human. Christ is the bridge between creator and creatures, between Lord and Servant, between divinity and humanity.

Through his Ascension we come to know that Christ is everywhere -he is in all things, and with all things and over all things, beyond space and time and with us now as close to us as our very breath. Christ reigns at God's right hand in Glory, the name above every name.

He ascends up into heaven lifting and sanctifying humanity. In the same way, heaven touches earth again through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to breathe life through the whole creation, and continue the work that has already been begun.

The Holy Spirit comes to enliven the church and re-create Christ's body, that it may be the means through which the kingdom of God will come on earth, as it is in heaven.

From a small group of bewildered men and women, grows a community of transformation and hope. Wherever prayers are said, and praises are offered, and bread and wine shared- wherever peace is proclaimed, and compassion enacted, this kingdom comes a little closer, Christ is present.

Prayer

We praise you and we bless you, our risen Lord Jesus, King of glory, for in your ascension you are crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. As we worship you on your heavenly throne, prepare our hearts for the coming of your Spirit. To you, Lord Jesus, who will come back in the same way you went up into heaven, be honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus: Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life: Lord Jesus, come in glory.

Music

Ascendit Deus in jubilatione, et Dominus in voce tubae. Alleluia.
Dominus in caelo paravit sedem suam. Alleluia.

God is gone up with a merry noise, and the Lord with the sound of the trumpet. Alleluia.
The Lord hath prepared his seat in heaven. Alleluia.

Words Psalms 47. 5 and 103. 19 • *Music* Peter Philips ?1560–1628