

Ascension Day Talk

Having read... Acts 1 & Daniel 9.

In some old baronial halls, stately homes and Torbay Hotels, you can see one of these. [deer's head on the walls, complete with antlers,] which are probably annoying from the point of view of dusting, but quite useful for Christmas decorations. It has frequently been observed that the stag must have been going at quite a rate to have got its head through the wall like that. Even though Bazil Fawltly's walls were paper thin.

The same could be said of the famous chapel dedicated to the Ascension in Walsingham which features this [two plaster feet sticking out from beneath the ceiling]. Faster than a bird, faster than a plane, faster than the space shuttle Discovery taking off on her final voyage, perhaps?

But of course the plaster feet are just a pictorial representation of something impossible to represent. I'm almost disappointed that we don't have something similar here, perhaps keep that in mind for our refurbishment discussion later?

No Jesus Journey wasn't from earth to space, nor from down here to up there, nor even from the world to heaven to sit in a literal place at the right hand of the father with God on the left. But Jesus made the transition as he had done at his incarnation, between as one writer put it "the universe of space and time that God has made, and his being which is ... beyond it." We don't think of heaven as 'up there' do we... but what other language can we use to describe these two spaces between which Jesus and one day we will travel?

What then does the Ascension of Jesus mean?

1) The Ascension marked the end of Christ's earthly appearances.

I am going to the father, where you can see me no longer (John 16:10)

There was a time, as Jesus had predicted, when the disciples stopped seeing Him. When the Resurrection Appearances ceased. Why did they cease, because Jesus was no longer around in the way that he had been around. As CS Lewis said 'a phantom can just fade away; but an objective entity must go somewhere – something must happen to it.' And the Ascension affirms that something has happened to Jesus' body. It has gone somewhere. It has gone to the Father. It has left this universe of space and time and gone to the very presence of God, who transcends what he has made.

2) The Ascension was the 'coronation' of Christ.

Daniel 7:13-14

The Daniel passage speaks the first time around of the vindication of Israel (the church) before its powerful enemies but points forward to the exultation of the Son of Man as Jesus called himself. He suffered and died at the hands of men, he came before God and a cloud hid him from their sight. He was vindicated and glorified and worshipped by all nations, and was given an everlasting kingdom. As the Resurrection was part one of the vindication and exultation of Jesus, the Ascension was part two. Jesus is on the throne, not Nebuchadnezzar (in Daniel), not Herod or Pilate or Caesar, not the Prime Minister or the Queen, not Seff Blatter. Not the stock exchange, not you or me.

This is great news. The governance of the universe is in safe hands. He alone will use power in the service of love.

3) The Ascension was the exultation of Christ, and therefore of humanity

If the Son of Man represents us, then what is true of Him becomes true also of us.

Ephesians 2:4-6 READ

In Jesus' Resurrection we were made alive with Christ. In Jesus Ascension we were raised up with Christ. His vindication is our vindication. His exultation is our exultation.

After the divine took on human form at the incarnation... now human nature is taken into the realm of God at the Ascension. If he sits on the thrones in heaven, therefore we sit in heavenly places, we stand in glory, we share in his reign. His enthronement is our enthronement. There is no higher place for us to aspire to.

4. The Ascension enabled the Spirit to be poured out on all humankind.

Jesus spoke of a time when the Spirit of God would not only operate in the background. He was there at creation, he led the rulers of Israel... but he would come and make his home in every believer. Jesus said "I tell you the truth. It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7) It is to the Ascension that we must be grateful for the coming of the Spirit.

5. The Ascension gives us a job to do

With Jesus no longer physically with us, God's primary means of working in his world is NOW through us. It is to that task he commissions us at the Ascension, and for that task he equips us at Pentecost. In his final charge to his disciples he makes a statement, issues a command and gives a promise.

The statement is that "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18) All authority, not some to me and some to Buddah and some to Mohammed and some to FIFA. All authority. Confirmed in the cross, resurrection and ascension. Only in his hands is such authority safe.

The command: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the F, and of the S and of the HS, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matt 28:19-20a) All authority has been given to Him, we are to make disciples of ALL nations. All peoples. We're not to go and make people's lives better, or bring health and education, but simply to give them Jesus. ALL His teaching, his sacraments, his understanding of God and his life through the Spirit.

Finally the promise: surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Mt 28:20b.
All authority... to all nations... with all things I've commanded you... and I am with you ALWAYS.
Nothing can prevent him from keeping his promise to be with his people always.

Pray.