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## Sermon

### ***The Ascension***

#### **Ephesians 1:15-23**

14<sup>th</sup> May, 2015

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This is a privileged congregation. You alone celebrate Maundy Thursday naturally, as it were. You alone, observe the Ascension – these are great events to bring before our minds and on which to feast!

I want to focus on the passage from Ephesians for a change. Paul starts this section by saying that he prays for them. He is constant in his prayer – he has not stopped giving thanks for them.

How would you feel to hear that from someone? In fact, that same message comes to us regularly from Bishop Given. He tells us that he prays for us every Thursday. He is amazed that this little parish should have turned out to be a significant supporter of his ministry.

Would you want to pray for another church in that way? Might you pray for the Church in Kondoia, who face far greater difficulties than we do. Their cathedral is smaller than our church. They have only three priests in the diocese who have a diploma apart from the Bishop and his wife who are a Doctor and a double-Masters.

Would you want to keep giving thanks for their courage and joy in the gospel?

In verse 17, Paul says he prays that the Father would give them/you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that they/you may know him better. That is relevant to the Ascension because Jesus said that unless he ascended, he could not send the Holy Spirit to us.

So Paul prays for them and us to receive the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation so that we may know God better. In my experience, it is only by the Holy Spirit that we come to any understanding of God. It is always revelation because these things are too great and mysterious for us. We may study to learn and that is good, but it still needs the moment of revelation to give us real understanding. In this we are like the petrol engine rather than a diesel. In the diesel engine, fuel and air are compressed together so much that enough heat is produced to ignite the mixture. That would be an analogy for our thinking out the matters of God. However, in the petrol engine, there is still some work but at the critical moment there is a spark which ignites the mixture. That is like the spark of divine revelation.

Recently, Torben had given up some time for Vestry sub-committee work and was feeling pressured because of the amount of work he had to do for his business. He told me that he had worked on a food development project for 5 years. It had now reached production but it had been found that the product developed cracks after a week and could not be sold. The customer was unhappy and he had another meeting the next day with them so he was planning to work through the night to solve the problem. I suggested we pray. Straightaway, a picture flashed onto my mind's eye. It was of a butterfly nut. That was followed by the words,

“It’s easy.” It made no sense to me, but it had been fairly clear, so I thought I had better tell Torben. He immediately associated “butterfly nut” with the butter in the recipe. He explained that there was a thickening agent in the recipe which is hard to mix in so he had been combining it with butter first. Perhaps he would change that. “Butter was the last thing I would have adjusted,” he said.

From that clue, he changed the recipe, (going against the wisdom of the last hundred years of baking) and he solved the problem. The result was so good that the company asked him to redesign their other products to make use of the same innovation. PTL! We need God’s revelation.

You might describe what happened to me as a picture in the eyes of my heart. Putting the picture I saw with Torben’s knowledge resulted in the direction he needed to know. So too, Paul continued to pray that “the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened so that we may know the hope to which God has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”

What is that power like – how could it be rated? It is that power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places. (There is the resurrection and ascension again.) By God’s great power, Christ was raised from death to life and from earth to heaven.

What is the status of that place to which Christ was raised? It is ...

<sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

He is set above all other powers, whether they are rules, authorities, powers or dominions in fact whatever title they might have, he is set above them. And this is not just for a little while, not just for this age in the grand scheme of God’s plan but for the one to come – that is beyond the Second Coming, the General Resurrection and Judgment into the Age to Come.

So if you wonder is Jesus greater than this or that spiritual power – the answer is yes he is. If you wonder is Jesus greater than this or that social or governmental power – the answer is that he is above all powers and authorities.

When Jesus ascended and sat down at the right hand of the Father, God placed all things under his feet. Remember, Matthew tells us in the Great Commission that Jesus said, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” All things are under his feet.

That does not mean that he is universally obeyed. In a kingdom, the king has all authority but not everyone obeys him. Adam and Eve were given authority over the earth and were to subdue it. It was not automatically subdued (and that was before the fall.) In the conquest of Canaan, Israel was given the land by God, but it took years for them to subdue it. God said to the people that he would “give them every place where they set their foot.” Authority can exist without being fully established or exerted. We are in that phase with Jesus. His kingdom has come and has not fully come. Part of our commission is to extend his kingdom. It is to use his delegated authority to call people and situations into obedience to Christ.

<sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way.

Jesus is appointed as the head of the Church, which is his body. He is head over everything for the Church.

The Ascension is the return to glory for the Son of God. In the Incarnation he laid aside his glory; in the Ascension he took it up again. Yet, he has a perfected glory because of his obedience. What it was in principle and by nature, it became in practice. His obedience, his self-sacrifice had been put to the test and found to be genuine.