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## Sermon

### ***Christ Ascended, Enthroned and Glorified***

**Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:15-23**

13<sup>th</sup> May 2018

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Last Thursday was forty days after Easter – it was Ascension Day. We have today the readings about the Ascension since most of us missed them on Thursday.

Ascension is an important event in the church year. We heard from Luke's accounts in the gospel and the Acts of the Apostles that in the period of forty days after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples multiple times, he taught them, commissioned them to preach the gospel and blessed them.

Then in the act of blessing them, he was taken up bodily into a cloud out of their sight. His followers were amazed – well wouldn't you be? Then we hear in Acts 1:10, of two men dressed in white who stood beside them and asked them why they were looking into sky. I think I would look up for some time! Did they know he wasn't coming back immediately? The messengers tell them,

"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."<sup>1</sup>

They clarify that Jesus had been taken up into heaven. And that the same person would come back in the future. Jesus will return – that is a major promise of the New Testament. The Son of God will return in his resurrection, human body and nature. We are told more about this in the 1 Thessalonians:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>2</sup>

The Book of Revelation echoes the same idea:

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 1:11

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 1:7

So Jesus left his disciples with the two promises. There was the promise of Jesus' eventual return as we have just heard. You can have confidence that Jesus will come again. It may be in our lifetime, it may not be. But he will come.

There was also, and more immediately, the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower and embolden them. In a few days the gift of the Father (the Holy Spirit) would be given. And so in a week we will celebrate Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The ascension was necessary for the Holy Spirit to be given to us. Jesus said in John 16:7 "It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

Turning to the passage from Ephesians, Paul wrote of his constant prayer for God to give them the Holy Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they might know him better.

It is the Holy Spirit who gives this knowledge. Scholarship does not result in knowing God. We need the Spirit of Christ to discern spiritual things – the natural mind alone cannot understand God's truth.

We may have to do some hard thinking, but the breakthroughs come as gifts – *aha* moments. St Paul referred to this need for divine revelation and wisdom in 1 Corinthians 2:

This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.<sup>4</sup>

Do you know that spiritual revelation? Do you know the Spirit of God? He is not to be feared but he is the presence of Christ with us as we go through life. Won't you ask for more openness to his presence with you?

## ***Enthronement***

What else is understood about the Ascension? The Apostles understood it as the enthronement of Jesus beside God the Father.

Paul writes in Ephesians 1:20-23 that "God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms." To be seated at the right hand of a sovereign is to have equality with the sovereign. Paul is saying that Jesus is equal to God the Father and that he is ruling.

This position is above all other authorities whether rulers, authorities, powers or dominions. It is above every title that can be given.

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.

Our own Queen is said to have commented on the account in Revelation of kings casting their crowns before the Lamb of God, by saying that hers would be first to be thrown down.

Paul tells us that Jesus' authority is all encompassing: all earthly authorities, all spiritual authorities, all in this age and all the age to come. Jesus is above all them. He himself said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,"<sup>5</sup> as Matthew quoted in his record of the Great Commission before the Ascension.

Now I think Christians get confused about God's sovereignty. If Jesus has all authority does that mean everything that happens is his perfect will? Many people take it that way and then blame God for all the bad things that happen in the world especially the events they don't like.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:13-14

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:18

But this is to neglect the fact that there is rebellion and disobedience to God's will – we call it sin and all humanity is infected with that disease. Because God has given us freewill not everything that happens is His will.

In any kingdom, the sovereign 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 (even before the fall.) God gave the Promised Land to Israel, saying he would “give them every place where they set their foot.” However, it took years for them to subdue it.

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. We do that as we use his delegated authority to call people and situations into obedience to Christ.

God has all power – to create the universe leaves no doubt about that - but he also limits how he uses that power. From our current perspective it may be hard to understand but it is arrogant to imagine we can understand everything that God knows. We can take comfort in the promise “... in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”<sup>6</sup>

Paul continues in verse 22:

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 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 was the return to glory for the Son of God. In the Incarnation the eternal Son laid aside his glory; in the Ascension he took it up again. Yet, he has a perfected glory because of his obedience. He had a divine glory before the incarnation. At the Ascension, his obedience, his self-sacrifice had been put to the test and proven.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 8:28