

## Sermon for 13.5.18 Ascension Sunday

Last Thursday, 40 days after Easter Sunday, we celebrated Ascension Day when the resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven to share honour, power and majesty with God.

The ascension of Jesus is foundational in our Christian faith, and as such embedded in our liturgical worship.

During the Eucharistic great thanksgiving prayer, the priest proclaims, and gives thanks for, Jesus offering of himself upon the cross and his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension.

The ascension is also a claim made in our creed that “he ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”

For many of us in the modern age, the imagery of Jesus bodily ascending into heaven while his disciples stand by looking on, may be a stretch of the imagination, yet such an image – and there are many versions depicted in different art works, some with the disciples looking up at Jesus legs and feet as he ascends and disappears in the clouds - all provide us with an image that illuminates Jesus taking up his position of real authority in his oneness with God the Father in the heavenly realm.

Jesus ascension in his human form also reassures us that we too as his friends are part of this ascension with him. We too know the way home to the one who made us.

Walter Brueggemann, contemporary theologian and Old Testament scholar suggests that the physical ascent of Jesus, written by the New Testament writers, comes from an ancient way of using poetic imagery to describe vividly the event of a god figure coming into divine power and majesty.

Such imagery was frequently used for gods who were ascending to power and being acknowledged as a real ruler who must be obeyed. Brueggemann suggests that the imagery was likely used in Canaanite liturgy for their god Baal and was taken over for use of YHWH the God of Israel - and at the time of writing the gospels the early church did the same.

Brueggemann suggests that the early church has taken poetry of the ascent of YHWH and transforms it into the ascent of Jesus who is now the one who is elevated and celebrated with majestic sovereignty.

Even so, Brueggemann takes this claim as a majestic poetic affirmation, that Jesus now is “high and lifted up” in majesty, that the one crucified and risen is now the one who shares God’s power and rules over all the earth.

Whichever way the ascension of Jesus into heaven to sit on the right hand of the Father, is understood, either literally or metaphorically, the message the event delivers, is that the Ascent of Jesus speaks to us about Jesus coming into cosmic authority.

The same Jesus who was known in the gospel narrative, is able to do on a cosmic scale what Jesus of Nazareth had done locally. He feeds hungry multitudes. He touches lepers and they are healed. He welcomes children who are vulnerable. He enjoys the company of those disapproved of by proper society.<sup>1</sup>

And it is this truth I believe, that we confess in the creed – it is this that the priest give thanks for in the Eucharist prayer, for, even on a cosmic scale- our God remains the one who

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann: “The good news of Cosmic Regime Change,” in *The collected sermons of Walter Brueggemann*, WJK Kentucky, 2011, p291.

came as one of us, the one who knows personal encounter, the one who calls us his friends and the one whose Holy Spirit accompanies us and leads us into all truth in the world.

The gospel reading today is a section of the prayer that Jesus prayed for those who would continue his mission on earth to reveal the Father and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and who would know his joy.

The prayer reflects the oneness of God and Jesus. It also calls us into unity in this oneness.

Jesus prayed this prayer at the close of his earthly ministry for his disciples in his time, and for future disciples - you and I - for disciples in all ages are to make up his church and remain his body in the world.

Jesus prayer for us illuminates his love for his friends and his oneness with the father.

It holds his friends in the heart felt knowledge that we live in him as he lives in us.

That he is the vine and we are the branches and that we belong to this oneness.

As the ascended Lord, Jesus Christ is the glue of the universe - as Paul writes in Colossians.

His love holds all things together –personally and corporately – and I believe we experienced this yesterday when some of us who have experienced personal loss, gathered at All Saints to be with each other and share together feelings and thoughts, in the safety of his presence in the Holy Spirit, and in the safety and unity of one other.

Christ's love on a cosmic scale is for the one and the many.

May we be open to, and trust in receiving it personally in our daily lives and reach out to the many we meet to share the joy of it.

The Lord be with you.