

“Celebrating The Ascension of Jesus!”

Acts 1:9 – 11

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

'After Jesus said this, he was taken up before the very eyes of his disciples, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "Why do you stand here looking up into the sky? 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.'

I guess most of us really love joining in celebrations, especially when family or close friends are involved. What an exciting time when parents and grandparents witness the birth of a newborn child into their family! With the child bawling and screwing up its face, the grandparents will still exclaim, 'What a beautiful baby!' We enjoy celebrating birthdays, baptisms, engagements, weddings, graduations, and special anniversaries.

This morning we are celebrating the special anniversary of Jesus' ascension into heaven. Often this anniversary is overlooked because it always falls on a Thursday, exactly 40 days after Jesus' resurrection. So today, 3 days later on, we are actually celebrating the CORONATION of Jesus, his crowning glory as he returns to live in heaven.

I do not want to reveal my age, but I can clearly remember the coronation of Queen Elizabeth the second. It was a brilliant display of pomp and ceremony, as she ascended to the throne after the death of her father. Thousands and thousands of people witnessed the ceremony across this world-wide event.

Jesus' ascension into heaven? Witnessed by a small band of disciples and 2 men, angels, dressed in white. Let's take a quick look why Jesus came into this world, and why he returned to his home in heaven.

Paul tells us in Galatians 4:4: ***"But when the time was right, God the Father sent his Son, and a woman gave birth to him."*** His Son obeyed God's law, so he could set us free from the Law, and we could become God's children. Jesus, born in a palace? – hardly – he was born in a smelly stable. The only visitors were a few ordinary shepherds.

In his early 30's Jesus clearly revealed the Father's purpose in his coming to this world – For God the Father loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. Easy for Jesus? – hardly – He died a cruel and slow death on the cross of Calvary. But that was nothing compared to the mental anguish He suffered to get rid of the sins of all people of all time, including yours and mine. So that is the end of the story? We wouldn't be here today if it were!

On the third day Jesus was raised from death to life! He is Lord and Conqueror of all sin, death, evil and hell. Doesn't look very much like that when we look at society today. Wicked wars, abuses of morality, slander and evil associated with elections, our own pride and selfishness. We admit our own inadequacy and sinfulness before God. But Jesus says to each one of us as he said to Martha, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die, and whoever believes in me will never die. Do you believe this!' And our response? With Paul we exclaim, 'For I am sure that neither death nor life ...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

We return to this day of Jesus' ascension. Yes, it's 40 days after Jesus' resurrection. He has led his disciples out of Jerusalem to Bethany. He gives them final instructions. **"I have all power in heaven and on earth,"** he tells them. **"You go into all the world to share my good news. Be my witnesses. I'll be with you always."**

They hear and they watch. He raises his hands in blessing. Slowly, majestically, he begins to ascend. Spellbound, they see that holy body rise, until it disappears into a cloud. The disciples keep staring upward. They hear voices, 2 men clothed in dazzling white have a message for them –: **"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come again in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."**

It is God's gentle way of bringing their thoughts down to earth. Their continued staring upwards is understandable. They want another look at their dear Lord. They can't however, do much witnessing for Jesus, looking up into the sky. They now have a life to live for him here on this earth. And so do we, whom God in his miraculous love has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light.

In just 10 days it happened! The special day of Pentecost! The Holy Spirit came upon these disciples and jelled and clarified into their hearts and minds everything Jesus had told them and taught them. They became fearless witnesses in proclaiming Jesus as Saviour and Lord. This was the exciting beginning of the NT Christian Church, the Church to which we belong today, the Church which is central at Victory and St John's, the Church of which Jesus is Lord.

John says this in his first letter, **"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us through Jesus, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are. What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Jesus appears again, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."**

Jesus says, **"Believe in my Father and also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am."**

Again, Jesus says, **"Because I live, you will live also."**

All these promises and priceless gifts are offered to us by Jesus. Trust and believe in him as your Lord and Saviour and Friend, and you will have a certain present and a fantastic future with Jesus forever and ever.

I cannot help but conclude with the words of St Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, **"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** **AMEN.**

Now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

