

CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 22

Thursday 21st May 2020, Ascension Day

‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’

Welcome

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot on Ascension Day. Below Ron reflects on how this shows us the importance of Jesus and also what we can become as human beings. In this edition you can also find below some ideas on how we can mark the ten days between Ascension Day and Pentecost as a special time of prayer.

Scripture Passages

Acts 1: 1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has

come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Ephesians 1: 15-23

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Reflection

Children have a way of taking things literally. If you tell them you'll do something in a minute, *they will time you*. So a child asked if God had pins and needles. "Why?" asked Mum. "Because in church the Vicar said Jesus is always sitting on God's right hand."

The image we're trying to conjure up is of a king's throne room. Beside the throne for the king himself might be other seats, for the great counsellors and advisors, or for people the king might want to honour. And the place of honour, in the throne room, or at a feast, was on the king's right hand. In ancient Egypt, the Pharaoh's chief of staff, or vizier, was known as the Fan Bearer at the King's Right Hand. I know I'm labouring the point a bit, but we know what we mean by saying someone is our right-hand man.

Symbolically, we're saying Jesus is raised to the position of honour - he is God's right-hand man. He didn't have to go "up" to get there, but for people like us, the symbol of him being raised up works pretty well.

Why this matters to us, is that having friends in high places has always been seen as a good thing. A humble servant looking for some honour or recognition from the king, or even the chance to plead a just cause, would certainly think it a good thing to have a friend in court.

Nicky Gumbel, of Alpha Course fame, tells the story of an American civil war veteran begging outside the White House. A small boy asked him what was the problem. He said nobody was listening to the veterans. They weren't getting the help they needed, or even the recognition that they needed any help. The little boy said, "Come with me," and the soldier followed him through the gates, past the sentries, into the house, past more sentries, right up to the Oval Office itself. There was President Lincoln. The president asked, "What is it, Bradley?" and the boy said, "Father, this man would like you to listen to him."

Now we know that God is always more ready to listen than we are to pray, and we don't have to twist God's arm to make him hear our prayers, and give us what he knows we need. But it ought to give us confidence to know that Jesus is at his Father's right hand, and that when we pray, our prayers do go to the highest authority.

A lady once confided in me that she had difficulty saying the Lord's Prayer. Her own father had been a drunken bully, and she had a problem with God's Fatherhood as a result. But Jesus was fine. A person she could relate to. And that was really what the whole business of God becoming human in Jesus was all about. The sheer enormousness of God is really beyond our imagining. Whatever we try to say about God is bound to be inadequate to the point of being crass. But Jesus? We can understand him. He's one of us. He understands what it's like to be us, and he can translate our individual needs and wishes right to God the Father.

Another thing about the Ascension. It means there is nobody more important than Jesus. We say this, but we don't often act as though we believe it. We pay more attention to what others say than we do to the words of Jesus. We'll put more effort into the programme of some politician than we do for Jesus' programme for the world. God has raised Jesus to the position of highest authority in the universe, and even the greatest human beings on earth, even the angels, don't come up to his knee-high.

And again, the Ascension means that our human nature is raised to glory. We usually behave as though human beings are the most important creatures in the universe. Never mind the orang-utans. We cut down their forests because we need wood, or palm oil, or something. No species has the capacity to screw up the earth like *homo sapiens* has. No other creature has disobeyed the creator like we have. We're a disaster on two legs.

Yet Jesus was incarnate in a human body. God the Son became a human being, and remains a human being, even exalted into heaven. So human nature, with all its failings, was raised to God's right hand on high. Weak, fallible, stupid and wicked human beings like me are capable of occupying the spiritual realm. Jesus became what we are, so we could become what he is. We were made in the image of God, but because of our sin, that image became blurred out of all recognition. In Jesus, the image is made clear and sharp again - the image of God stamped clearly on human nature again. He has gone before us as the pioneer and representative of the human race, to sit on the throne beside God. Jesus has shown what we could become. If we worship him, and follow him, he'll see us fit to live in the presence of God ourselves, in eternity.

Ron

Hymn Suggestion

A traditional Ascension Day hymn is 'Crown him with many crowns' which you can find on YouTube.

Why not try?

For the past few years the Church has been encouraging us to keep the ten days between Ascension and Pentecost as a special time of prayer. You can find details of this on the Church of England website and also on www.thykingdomcome.global. These have a number of resources which you might like to try out. Alternatively God may put another initiative on your heart to mark this out as a special time of prayer. I am aiming to pray for different members of my immediate neighbourhood and family on each of these ten days.

Points for Prayers

- Give thanks for Jesus' exaltation at the right hand of God and that He shows us what we could become
- Thanksgiving for care, skill and courage of NHS workers and those in care homes
- Those suffering from coronavirus in hospitals, care homes and at home
- Need for further largescale testing
- Prayers for wisdom in relation to implementing the 'roadmap' outlined for the lifting of the lockdown including the reopening of churches
- Funerals needing to take place under new restrictions with only family mourners
- Prayers for those affected economically by the lockdown, for businesses and those who have become unemployed
- Prayers and thanksgiving for contributions to the foodbanks and for those helping to take these to the foodbanks.

Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family

*We pray that 'we might live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5:2)