

Ascension - 13 May 2018

In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, 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 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." (Act 1:1-11 NIV)

Ascension Day is increasingly overlooked as a festival in the Church. Coming ten days before Pentecost and forty days after Easter, it marks an important transition between the earthly life of Christ following his resurrection and the beginning of the work of the Spirit in the people of God as recorded in Acts and on up to the present-day. It is the day when Christians believe Jesus returned to heaven.

The ascension must have felt like a second bereavement for the disciples, a final departure leaving the disciples alone. However this time, when Jesus left the disciples, they trusted Him and carried on with His work. The response of Mary and the disciples to Christ's ascension was to return to Jerusalem and "They all joined together constantly in prayer". (Act 1:14a, NIV)

The fact that Christ ascended back to his Father is referred to a number of times in the Bible as an important reference point for the faith of Christians. For example it means that Christ, is alive – if he had stayed on Earth, what would have become of him, instead he is now ruling with God the Father and the Holy Spirit as one person of the Trinity and interceding for us there, having taken into the Godhead an understanding of what it means to be human. It also means that he now sits in triumph at the right hand of the Father as head of the Church awaiting the final victory on earth.

it is further proof that Jesus is more than a man, but God himself and deserving of praise and worship. Paul in his letter to the Philippians, told the early followers that: "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father". (Php 2:9-11 NIV)

The ascension also opens the way for Jesus to send his Holy Spirit on all who believe, as he promised, so they might experience his presence with them in a new invisible way from now until he returns again. Jesus before his crucifixion had told the disciples: But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. (Joh 16:7, NIV)

As he was still speaking, Jesus began to disappear into a cloud. The cloud was an important symbol to the Jews. It had been the sign of God's presence when the people of Israel had left Egypt in the

Exodus. It had become the way of talking about God – he was in the cloud, mysterious, not completely knowable by humans, he was holy, therefore Jesus was God.

But what does it mean to us to day:

Firstly he can and will return: he promised His disciples “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”. (Joh 14:3 NIV). However he also warned that "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Mat 24:36 NIV), so anyone who tells you he will come on a set date or at a set time is not speaking Gods truth – but He will come again.

We are also told “At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible”. (Mat 24:23-24 NIV) and "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. (Mat 24:30 NIV)

As our passage today says, he will come they way he went. Christ will not return as a baby again, born of a woman and no-one, no matter how amazing they seem, is Christ, who does not return on the clouds.

In the mean time, Christ the man is not on the Earth, although His spirit is here, therefore He has no hands to do His work, except our own, our calling at this time is to do His work, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. James tells us “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead”. (Jas 2:26 NIV). We are all tasked with doing His work.

Lets Pray:

Almighty God, we believe that your only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ has ascended into the heavens; we pray we may also ascend in heart and mind and be with him who lives and reigns always with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Lord hear and answer this prayer, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ Amen.

Ascension shoes

Get set:

You will need some pairs of shoes as visual aids for this talk. A pair of soccer boots; a pair of slippers; and a pair of sandals. Put these into three shoeboxes, which you can open at the appropriate moments.

Go!

1. Start with this riddle:

What has a sole but no body? A tongue but no mouth? Needs 'heeling' but there's no wound? Can be any length but is always a foot? And what is it that must always accept de-feet!

A pair of shoes of course. There are millions of shoes in the world and there are always new shoe shops opening in the High Street; from ballet shoes to walking shoes; from high-heeled shoes to Wellington boots; from trainers to babies' booties.

2. Who has had new shoes recently? Amazingly it's often hard to find the right size, style and colour etc despite there being so many to choose from. Just think how many used shoes there must be in the world? How many empty shoes! Empty shoes can sometimes bring back memories too!

Perhaps you can talk about some empty shoes from your own experience that have memories attached!

3. I don't know whether Jesus left any empty shoes behind when he left his disciples at the Ascension but it made me think. He certainly left an empty place – an emptiness after three years of being together; after the three days of death and resurrection; and after the 40 days of his re-appearings. You'd think that disciples would have been sad but in fact Luke tells us that they weren't. They were full of joy, worshipping and praying and of course waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit, which he had promised them. They must also have thought about what his Ascension meant and maybe some imaginary empty shoes of Jesus can help us understand what had happened. The empty cross and empty tomb were clear reminders of the facts that Jesus had died and had risen. How might empty shoes help us understand about Jesus' Ascension?

4. There are three pairs of shoes in these three boxes. I wonder how each of them could help us understand why Jesus ascended. Maybe the word 'shoe' itself can be a starting place. The letters of the word could stand for:

Seated High Over Everything! This is where Jesus is now for us but what does it mean?

5. Open the first box to reveal a pair of soccer boots. Make a comment about how well worn they are and how they may well have been seasoned goalscorers! Maybe even those worn in a final? Maybe on the winning side? Make some reference to current football finals in the news, although be sensitive if a local team has not been successful!

These football boots remind me of a football victory when the winning team goes up to fetch the cup and everyone cheers "we've won ", even though the fans themselves haven't ever touched the ball! Jesus at his Ascension goes up to collect the cup from the Easter victory and if we're in his team we too can say 'we've won'. We can share in the joy and excitement of his victory right here on earth, whatever our situation is. The enemy is now under his feet because of what happened at Easter and so we too can 'reign' in our lives knowing that he reigns. These shoes remind me that **Jesus is now the King who reigns.**

6. Open the second box and reveal a pair of slippers. Where do you normally wear slippers? Usually at home when you're relaxing or resting. These remind me that Jesus at his Ascension went home - to heaven. Back to be with his Father, welcomed by angels. And because he is at home we can trust that we too will find a home in heaven with him. How? Because the entry price to heaven has been paid for us at Easter. Jesus paid that price and the marks of the nails are still visible in heaven to prove the price was paid. These shoes remind me that **Jesus is the Rescuer who pays.**

7. Finally open the box with the sandals. These make me think of summer and warm weather. They

are also much more like the sort of shoes Jesus would have worn. Shoes in which he walked, taught and healed, as he met with the sadness, loneliness and tiredness of our world; the shoes in which Jesus lived his earthy life. It was a life like yours and mine that experienced the same temptations and difficulties. The Ascension tells me that Jesus took all this experience into heaven. He can understand me and can talk to the Father directly, with real feeling for my situation. He prays for me. He's talking about you and me in heaven now. These shoes remind me that **Jesus is the Friend who prays.**

8. These three pairs of shoes may help you remember that, though Jesus isn't here now in a way that needs shoes *with an earthly body*, the ascension is still important for us. He's now in the place of victory and shares it with us. *He has played for us and won.* He's now at home and is preparing a place for us. *He has paid for us to go in.* He's also at prayer – speaking about us with understanding. *He prays for us to win*

9. Jesus has been in our shoes on earth so that one day we can be in his shoes in heaven. This is the truth of the Ascension. And there is at least one other thought too. Jesus wore our shoes on earth. He now wants to go on walking in our shoes through the Holy Spirit, whose coming we celebrate. Ours will be the feet, which he uses to go on walking this earth to heal and transform this world. The truth of the Ascension is so important for us. Jesus reigns. Jesus has paid the price of entry into heaven. Jesus prays for us this coming week and always.