

Ascension Day Holy Communion

St. Luke's Gospel gives us the basis of pretty much the whole Christian year. Luke starts with The Annunciation and then the birth of Jesus and takes us through the saving work of Christ culminating in the Gospel with the Ascension. Then in his second volume, the Acts, Luke continues the story beginning with the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Interestingly Luke's work in Acts appears to end rather abruptly with Paul in prison but preaching the Gospel. Much scholarly ink has been spilt over that – but whatever the reason I suspect Luke would be glad to think that his book for us remains without an ending – for we do not know the ending. Only God knows that. What Jesus did then St. Luke wants us to grasp, is what the Church through the Holy Spirit is doing now – and that includes us today. The Risen and ascended Christ continues to pour out his Holy Spirit upon the church so that the Church may continue, even develop, Christ's mission – so that the world may know the healing, saving love of God worked out in Incarnation, Crucifixion and resurrection.

As we worship on Ascension Day we take especial encouragement from that wonderful last glimpse of the Incarnate Jesus: "While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven". Jesus was blessing them then, he is blessing us now.

Still for us His death He pleads,
Still for us He intercedes,
Near Himself prepares our place,
First fruits of the human race, Alleluia!

Christ's Ascension is Christ's eternal blessing of his Church for mission, for service, for evangelism and for worship. Notice what the Church is doing, what the disciples are doing, at the very end of Luke's Gospel: they worshipped him, and were continually in the temple blessing God. That is the primary work of the church out of which all other mission flows: to praise God. That is the primary work of Jesus: to praise God. That is the primary function and purpose of the world, though it often chooses not to know: to praise God.

We are too often so wrapped up in ourselves that we find it hard to imagine that praising and glorifying God is not somehow demeaning to ourselves. The Church, through the Eucharist, discovers otherwise. In worshipping the Ascended Christ we worship the only true reality which we name God and thereby discover our own worth and value as we receive Christ's blessing.

As the New Testament church worshiped so it read the scriptures – our Old Testament. The Old Testament not only points to Christ but is fulfilled in Christ. Jesus born a baby in time, in Bethlehem, is also Christ the Word of God through whom, as Genesis declares, all things are made and in whom

all things have existence. There has never been a time when Christ was not- and there will never be any time or any place where Christ is not present, where Christ is not Lord. The Ascension of Christ declares Jesus Lord of all times, all ages, all places.

The Risen and Ascended Christ is lord of the Church and of the future. "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." that is, in the glory of God. As the church of God – and that is what we are as we worship and praise and witness together day by day – as the church of God our primary and key role is to worship. Our service to Christ and his people can take many forms – all valuable: taking food to the foodbank, cutting the churchyard grass, arranging the flowers, making the coffee, visiting the sick. Some, like the first apostles may be called to more obviously dramatic mission. But at the heart of all, the core of what we are to be about in Christ is worship and praise – which is the life of the Blessed Trinity. Take away prayer, worship, Scripture, Eucharist, intercession and you take away faith, hope, point , purpose and the possibility of true humanity. Our highest priority, day by day, week by week , in church, at home, on the way to work, in the office, on the beach, yes, even in the restaurant is to offer worship to Christ determinedly and sacrificially – and the heart of that is the Eucharist- presided over by the ascended Christ who is the true Host- giving himself in broken bread and outpoured wine. Sunday by Sunday , day by day, our vocation is publicly to praise God and to declare to a world that thinks very much otherwise that Jesus truly is Lord, that in Jesus is found the only Way for full humanity, for healing, for well-being and for hope.

**He has raised our human nature
on the clouds to God's right hand;
there we sit in heavenly places,
there with him in glory stand:
Jesus reigns, adored by angels;
man with God is on the throne;
mighty Lord, in thine ascension
we by faith behold our own.**