

Sermon on Acts 1: 1-11

The Ascension

When the Word becomes flesh in Jesus, God shows the world that he is truly with us.

It's not an empty promise.

It's not a trick question.

God's promise of true presence with the world is realised in Jesus, it is actualised.

Jesus lives a human life, just like ours, so much so that he is even subject to death.

No other act could speak to us so powerfully.

God's power is displayed in Jesus becoming nothing, going to the lowest point of human experience.

Total letting go.

Complete sacrifice.

Jesus dies and so we know that God is not exercising a get out of jail free card.

Jesus doesn't just appear to be human, he really is human.

Yet in the resurrection we see that death doesn't triumph over God.

God triumphs by letting death do its worst and as Jesus is resurrected, death itself is made nothing.

Death is laid low as Jesus is raised up.

In Jesus' resurrected body we glimpse God's ultimate consummation of all things.

Jesus' scars are still visible.

He is still the one who was crucified.

Yet he is transformed so that death can no longer touch him.

He is no longer subject to death, but subject only to God's glorious life which is eternal.

At Easter this is what we celebrate.

God is truly with us, but there's more, there's hope beyond death, because Jesus is raised.

There is one piece of the puzzle missing.

God can be and is with us on earth, can we really be with God in heaven?

In all the presence of God's glory?

Can our frail human form really be taken fully into the presence of God's eternity?

It seems an amazing thought.

God comes to be with us.

Can we really ultimately go to be with God?

In the Ascension of Jesus we get God's answer.

And the answer is yes.

Jesus doesn't lose his humanness as he ascends back to his heavenly father.

He doesn't lay it aside like taking off a jacket.

He is still the crucified one, the one who was subject to death, but now he is risen from death, and ascends back into heaven.

Now little Hamish knows nothing of this.

And yet this promise is as much about him as it is any of us.

His life is ultimately kept in God.

Not a part of it.

Not a soul which floats above his human fleshliness.

All of who he is, is bound into God.

By baptising him we have affirmed this.

We don't just say he comes through the waters into new life, we pour water over him.

We don't just say he has a new family in faith, we walk him around and introduce him.

As he grows Meg and Simon and no doubt many others will delight in who he becomes; in his spirit, his personality, his gifts and graces.

They will continue to love all of who he is, even when he messes things up as he surely will from time to time.

This is what parents do.

Well it's the same with God.

God loves us in our entirety, into eternity.

It's not a hedge, not a half measure.

God doesn't have his fingers crossed behind his back when he receives Jesus back into his presence.

All of who we are is kept in God forever.

No ifs, no buts.

In the end, the ascension of Jesus is the final act in how God says, 'I love you'.

It's one of the hardest things for other religious traditions to accept about Christianity.

Surely, the divine cannot co-mingle, cannot inhabit frail flesh, less still receive it into heaven forever?

Surely the earthiness of our broken existence will corrupt it somehow?

God will no longer be pure, no longer immortal, no longer holy.

God can't remain God in this scenario.

The Christian faith says exactly the opposite.

It works the other way around.

We do not drag God down to our level, God lifts us up to his.

Our earthly, fallen, fallible lives are made sacred by God.

In receiving our lives in their fullness, God enfolds us in the fullness of his.

All those years ago the disciples had no real clue of what was going on.

Up, up and away.

Why do you gaze into heaven?

I'm the first to admit the Ascension can seem pretty remote and strange.

Luke uses pictures and metaphors to describe it.

But wonderfully in little Hamish and the faith of his parents Meg and Simon, and our enacting of baptism this day, we have seen a sign of all the Ascension tells us about God's faithfulness, God's love, God's eternal embrace.

God is all in with us, alongside us, for us.

As close as the person sitting next to us, as close as our own breath.

And it will remain this way throughout our lives and when we come to die and onwards into eternity forever until Jesus returns.

This is who God is... love, love, love, eternally and forever.

Amen.