

Sermon May 29th 2022-05-28 Fr Simon Cuff

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As a Church, we're trying to find new ways to improve the accessibility of our building. As part of this, we've been looking at finding the best location for a second accessible fire exit. An exploration made possible by Liz Kohler's generous legacy to us, a fitting tribute to her passion for welcome and inclusion of the entire community we are called to serve. We've looked at proposals including ramps, automatic doors, and even the possibility of an external lift.

Today, we celebrate the Feast of Ascension. Christian artists and preachers have often struggled to depict the Feast we celebrate Today. They struggle to depict the descriptions of the Ascension we find in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Jesus being 'carried up into heaven' and being 'lifted up, a cloud taking him out of their sight'.

Often they rely on creating a kind of heavenly accessible entrance for our Risen and Ascended Lord - something like a cloud-based external lift - or we see Jesus' little feet sticking out from heaven. A sign he's gone 'up' to where we hope one day to be.

The problem artists face here is the same problem we all face when we try to depict or describe the divine. We struggle to put into human and material terms what is eternal and immaterial. The Ascension is at the heart of this tension. The Ascension sees Christ's

humanity, our materiality, swept up in the very eternal life of God.

The Ascension is the end-point of the Incarnation, God's birth as one of us in Christ. As God becomes human in Christ, so in Christ our humanity is taken 'up' into the very life of God.

The theologian Joseph Ratzinger describes this new intimacy:

'In Christ ascended into Heaven, the human being has entered into intimacy with God in a new and unheard-of way; humanity henceforth finds room in God for ever'.

We find room in God for ever. We have access to God through Christ. Our very humanity has access to God through Christ. The Ascension is a sign of God's accessibility to us through Christ.

We see this in the question the disciples are asked by the two men in white robes: 'Why do you stand looking up towards heaven?'.

Why do you look for God 'up' there?

The Ascension reminds us that because of Christ's birth as of one us and his Resurrection for all of us, we forever enjoy accessibility to God, we forever enjoy 'intimacy with God in a new and unheard-of way'.

'Why do you stand looking up towards heaven?'.

Why do you look for God 'up' there?

The Ascension reminds us that God has taken us to Godself, and is ever calling us to Godself. God is not far from us or over there. God is not far removed us like a distant or disinterested parent. But, through Christ, God is closer to us than we can even begin to imagine.

We encounter God not 'up' there or over there but in our very selves. In our humanity taken up in Christ, God's Spirit poured in to our hearts, in each other - in the Church - and most of all in the Sacraments, in God's very presence with us in the form of bread and wine.

The Ascension is often overlooked in the Christian calendar and in the Christian life - reduced to a kind of heavenly 'stage exit' or those little dangling feet.

The Ascension is not so much an exit but our entrance, our being swept up in God's life, our invitation to see God alive today in our lives and in our hearts, to see God in each other and in Church, and most of all to be swept up into God's very life in the bread of the Eucharist through which God meets us now, calls us into intimacy, and sends us out to call others to realise that intimacy and enjoy that fellowship which has called each of us by name and called us to this place.