

THE ASCENSION AND US

A sermon preached by Laurence New on Sunday 21 May 2023



INTRODUCTION

In the Churches calendar we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus on 18 May; this year it fell on last Thursday. Fell is an appropriate word. Why is such an important event so overlooked.? The Ascension of Jesus was and is very important celebrating the crossing of the finishing line of Jesus's marathon. And introducing the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit the winning post of Jesus's marathon and because it was the initiation of a promise by which we as Christians are equipped and fortified to carry out the Great Commission, - - the promise of the Holy Spirit.

JESUS'S MARATHON

A Marathon is a helpful analogy. Our Church Warden, Werner Alberts has completed the eighty-mile Parish Walk six times finishing well within the qualifying twenty-four hours, most often in three hours. He can give evidence that there is much pain involved, cramps, blister and a huge temptations to give up. Jesus's marathon had many of those elements and much worse. Leaving the peace of being at the Father's side to be born a man with all the tribulations involved in earthly life.;

subject to horrendous temptation of the subtlest nature in the Judean wilderness; apathy; rejection of His authority, hunger, fatigue, despair; arrest. false trial, sentence as a criminal, beating within an inch of His life by the Roman Guards and subsequent nailing to a cross ;. But worse was to come, . The removal of the sacred stream of communion with His Heavenly Father came as a shock. It was precisely because on the cross Jesus had become sin in our place. He was s a unique and necessary sacrifice. He was so devastated that He cried out, quoting from the 22 Psalm written in Hebrew, “Eli , Eli, lama atzavtani – “ My God, My God Why have you cut off all contact with me?”

A marathon indeed. He must have longed to cross the finishing line and receive the exaltation of His Father at His Ascension..

One possible explanation for our carelessness of the Ascension – apart from plain ignorance – (**Matthew 2: 29**) - is that there is some debate about the exact chronology. Even Luke in his two books – the Gospel and the Acts of The Apostles - seems ambivalent. The Church decided long ago to follow the timings in The Acts of The Apostles. So it is as near as possible each year to 7 April for the Crucifixion; 9 April for the Resurrection; after 40days 18 May for the Ascension and after a further yen days 28 May for the Pentecost., coming of the Holy Spirit.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FORTY D LEADING TO THE ASCENSION?AYSENSION?

After His resurrection there were eight appearances by Jesus in His significantly different resurrection body , a body that did not suffer from hunger, fatigue nor locked doors,

1 Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb (**Mark 16:9**). Mary was weeping and did not recognise Him until He spoke her name.

2. Jesus appeared to 'other women' who presumably had come to the tomb to help Mary. (**Matthew 28:9-10**).

3. , Jesus met up with two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). These men were talking about all the week's events surrounding Jesus. They didn't understand what had happened. Jesus talked with them and stayed with them until they recognised Jesus as He broke the bread and gave thanks at their supper. They were so excited that they walked back up the 60 stadia (eight miles) to Jerusalem to proclaim "We have seen the Lord".

4. Jesus appeared to 10 disciples who were sheltering uncertainly in the Upper Room. (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25). He greeted them with , "Peace to you!"³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marvelling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,^[a]⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

5. Several days later , Jesus appeared to all 11 remaining disciples (Mark 16:14; John 20:26-31). Famously Thomas, now present, was brought to proclaim "My Lord and my God".

6. Jesus appeared to seven disciples, including Peter, who had spent the night fishing in vain, denied Jesus three times (John 21). At this appearance, Jesus puts Peter back into ministry by asking him three times to declare that he Loved Him. (John 21).

7. . Jesus appeared to five hundred of His followers at one time when he explained His mission to them which was now to become theirs..(Luke 22:44-49; Acts 1:3-8).

8. At His final appearance Jesus charged His disciples before with their Great Commission leaving them. . I reproduce a small part of what we heard read by Yolande as our second lesson. .(Acts 1:1-11)

Jesus said “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

And from Luke 24 ...which we heard read by David as our Gospel. I quote in part.

49. Jesus said Behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high⁵⁰ And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.⁵² And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,⁵³ and were continually in the temple blessing God.

We can leave the disciples at this point as they climb from Bethany to the Mount of Olives and descent into Jerusalem where they hunkered down as instructed. , to wait what we now know would be e ten days) t for the coming upon them of the Holy Spirit. Rather, let us consider what Jesus had just done.

WHAT NEXT ?

1. Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel that we heard read by Gail as our first lesson. I quote in part. “He sits on a throne at the right hand of the Father, who gives Him everlasting dominion of a kingdom of all peoples, nations and languages which will never pass away” (**Daniel 7 vv 9-14.**)

2. He was entering into His task of being our mediator and advocacy with the Father. His death and resurrection have given him this unique role (2 Corinthians 5 v 18 -21). “He had become our Great High Priest interceding for us” (Romans 8 v34), especially in our struggles (John 14 v13-14).
3. . He had become our judge e. We have discussed this many times. At our physical death Our Salvation will determine the destiny of our soul, either er into Intermediate Heaven or Intermediate Hell (Matthew 7 ; 13 -14) . On the Day of Judgement when the Books are opened, and we stand before the Judgement Seat the measure of our Sanctification (how well we managed to grow more like Jesus during the remainder of our lifetime) will determine our usefulness to Jesus in the New Heaven and the New Earth.(Revelations 5 ; 10)

.Those sermons on Judgement remain on the website. The glorious news is that those of us who truly believe in His sacrificial death on the cross and have repented, are already justified in the eyes of the Father. Having ‘put on Christ’, when the Father looks at us he sees only Jesus. (Galatians 3 v27). As far as judgement is concerned our sins are as far as the East is from the West. (Psalm 103; 12).

Our Part.

I have called this sermon “The Ascension and us.” So what is our part in this ? How should we respond? We must appropriate His solemn promise o that He would ask the Father to send another Greek another = like himself Indeed in many verses in the Bible the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Spirit of Jesus.

Secondly we must develop the discipline of involving the Holy Spirit in our every decision and action. We call that Pray and Plan and ever since we started this church we have as a Council endeavoured to Pray before Planning. . Only yesterday morning at our Church Council meeting we started with meditation on the Bible by Fenella - - she chose Ephesians 5. Then we prayed aloud earnestly that the Holy Spirit would direct our discussion and decision. Our experience over the past seven years has been that we are invariably led to unanimity.

To operate in any lesser way, to decline to accept the promise of divine direction would be like the winner of the marathon declining to attend the award ceremony. As we have discussed before Pray and Plan is not as easy as it may sound. Because it is such a force multiplier it will be opposed by the devil at every turn. But we cannot hope to succeed with our Great Commission (Matthew 28 : 16-20) without seeking the leading and involvement of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

The ascension of Jesus is crucially important. Not only was Jesus being released to be with the Father; He was also being exalted by the Father. Paul emphasised this in his letter to the Philippians .. “Jesus had humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2 v 8-11)

At His ascension Jesus’s last words included a promise to us who believe..

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.(“ . John 14:16–17.)

I have to ask you, have you truly and deliberately allowed the Holy Spirit of Jesus to be actively engaged in your life? It is a very personal question and a very important one.
Amen

