

Worship for Cashmere Presbyterian Church for Sunday 1 June 2020

Pentecost Sunday

Call to worship

As we remember this day of Pentecost
Which so transformed the disciples
May we too be increasingly transformed
Into a world changing body of Christ.

Opening Prayer¹

Beautiful Lord,
may we say “yes” to you
so that the Spirit in our hearts
will once again be set ablaze.

Spirit of Wisdom,
guide our actions so they tell of God’s love.

Spirit of Truth,
open our eyes to see the world as it really is.

Spirit of Power,
enthuse us to work for justice throughout the world.

Spirit of Love,
inspire us to respect the dignity of each person.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill our hearts.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill us.

Come, Holy Spirit.

Come.

Hymn

Glory be to God the Father, Glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit, Great Jehovah three in One.
Glory, glory, glory, glory while eternal ages run.

Glory be to Him who loved us, Washed us from each spot and stain.
Glory be to Him who bought us, Made us kings with Him to reign.
Glory, glory, glory, glory to the Lamb who once was slain.

Glory to the King of Angels, Glory to the Church's King.
Glory to the King of nations, Heaven and earth your praises bring.
Glory, glory, glory, glory to the King of Nations bring.

Glory blessing praise eternal, Thus the choir of angels sings.
Honor riches power dominion, Thus its praise creation brings.
Glory, glory, glory, glory, glory to the King of Kings



¹ CAFOD

The Word

Last week we began a new series called 'Welcome to our World Jesus'. It started with the incarnation, the announcement that Mary was to bear the Son of the Most High and the welcoming of Jesus to planet earth. Today we jump ahead to the end of the story, Jesus leaving this earth to return home to the Father. We read about his at the beginning of the book of Acts.

Acts 1:1-11

¹In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Sermon

Today's sermon digs deep. I want to talk about Christology. It is the branch of Christian theology relating to the person, nature, and role of Christ. There are 6 key events that provide a Christological framework for God's interaction with planet earth and humankind through Jesus Christ.

Last week we examined the first of these. It is called the incarnation and involved God becoming a human being, taking on human flesh and human language in the form of Jesus.

We have most recently been in the season of Easter and celebrating the 2nd and 3rd key events – the death and resurrection of Jesus. These events lock into the theological framework victory over sin and death and provide us a pathway to salvation and eternal life.

Presently we are in the church season of Ascension and Pentecost – these are key events 4 and 5. It was Ascension Day 10 days ago and today is Pentecost Sunday. It is these two events that I want to look at today, particularly in relation to the other key events, for they form an interconnected sequence that bring us a depth of theological insight into who Jesus is and how God has worked in and through Jesus.

Let us start with Ascension.

This is the event that see Jesus leave planet earth in a mysterious lift off into the clouds! The clouds are significant. Throughout the bible clouds symbolically represent the presence of God in an overwhelmingly powerful and mysterious way. The idea is that God is at work in a way that is beyond our ability to fully understand. Certainly, I think this ascension event

the least understood of the key events in Jesus life, and yet it is packed with meaning and significance. This came home to me on Ascension Day 2009. I was ministering in a Methodist Church in London at the time. It was Thursday 21 May, and I read in the paper that morning that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was preaching at the Ascension Day evensong service at Westminster Abbey. I was delighted to get the chance to attend this memorable service. Ascension Day spent amongst the tombs of royals and prime ministers as the Archbishop of Canterbury preached on the ascension of the Prince of Peace to the right-hand side of the King of Kings. The context was spectacular, but so was the message. Rowan Williams is a fine theologian and he opened my eyes to the deep significance of the ascension in the Christological framework set out in the scriptures.

He begins his sermon quoting a popular ascension hymn that contains these words:

'Thou hast raised our human nature in the clouds at God's right hand.'

Williams goes on to say:

The ascension of Jesus is a celebration of the extraordinary fact that our humanity in all its variety, in all its vulnerability, has been taken by Jesus into the heart of the divine life. 'Man with God is on the throne,' that hymn goes on. Quite a shocking line if you start thinking about it. And that of course is first of all good news about humanity itself – the humanity that we all know to be stained, wounded, imprisoned in various ways; this humanity—yours and mine—is still capable of being embraced by God, shot through with God's glory, received and welcomed in the burning heart of reality itself: to the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast, as another hymn puts it. But let's pursue that theme just a little bit further. Jesus takes our human nature—yours and mine—to the heart of God and he speaks to God his father in a human voice. In heaven the language they speak is human (not just angelic). Our words (human words) are heard at the very centre of the burning heart of reality.

You can read the full sermon by going to the following link:

<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/883/a-sermon-by-the-archbishop-of-canterbury-at-the-ascension-day-sung-eucharist>

If we see the ascension of Jesus back to heaven as a home coming, then this event is not just about Jesus returning to his heavenly home, it is about humanity finding a heavenly home with God.

And this all fits so neatly with the key Christological events that have gone before:

1. Incarnation is about God's identification with the human race
2. The crucifixion is about God in Jesus removing the barrier between us and God caused by the imbalance of the holy perfection of God and the sinful propensity of human beings. Sin is dealt with by Jesus on the cross.
3. The resurrection is about the conquering of death, and the possibility of eternal life with God.
4. In the ascension the first fruits of this are realised as the humanity in Jesus is taken to the very heart of the Godhead.
5. Which brings us to the next key event in this sequence – Pentecost

Now where does Pentecost fit with all of this?

There is an interesting verse in John 16:7 where Jesus is explaining the connection with his leaving and the coming of the Holy Spirit:

⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Holy Spirit will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

Why was it necessary for Jesus to go so that the Spirit could come?

Firstly, it is about union with God that is achieved in first the death of Jesus for our sins and then Jesus taking our humanity to the heart of God in the ascension. Prior to this sin was an insurmountable obstacle to humans and God being one. Prior to this therefore, while the Holy Spirit fell upon people and inspired them, there was not the deep inner filling of the Holy Spirit that we see at Pentecost. An image that helps me to understand this is of water behind a dam that holds water for irrigation. When the floodgates are opened the water flows out to the parched lands below. But the walls of the dam separate the water from the pastures. In this image, the Holy Spirit is like the life giving water, the walls of the dam created by our sinfulness, and the sequence of cross, resurrection and ascension are like the levers that open the floodgates that allow the Holy Spirit to be poured out on us.

Secondly, Jesus' earthly ministry was tied to a time and place. He was limited. His goal was to replace that with his spirit that could be everywhere at all times. It was part of a masterplan of God's mission to the earth. Jesus establishes the beachhead, the Spirit working in us to take his mission to the world. One commentator I read put it this way:

This signified the end of earthly ministry of Jesus and the beginning of the work of the church. Jesus was giving the church its marching orders. The emphasis is continuity with the 3 year ministry of Jesus but expansion of it as the Church under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit moves this message out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

William Barclay says 'In one sense it is the whole lesson of Acts that the life of Jesus goes on in his church.' Barclay goes on to tell the story of an inquirer from Hinduism who came to an Indian bishop. All unaided he had read the New Testament. The story of it had fascinated him and Christ had captured his imagination. As he finished reading the gospel story of Jesus' life and moved into the book of Acts he said he felt he was entering a whole new world. He saw the church continuing where Jesus left off and he said to the bishop:

'I must belong to the church that carries on the life of Christ'

Me too! What about you! Today I have sought to outline the philosophical, the theological, the Christological framework for God's intervention in this world through Jesus Christ as contained in the New Testament. It has elements of complexity and mystery about it. Things that we do not fully understand, things that still seem like steering into a cloud as the disciples did as Jesus left then that last time. When we have an amazing spiritual experience like the one the disciples had, it is tempting to want to just stay in that space for as long as possible. But the counsel of the angels to the disciples was full of down to earth wisdom;

Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?

In this we see the old adage of being too heavenly to be of any earthly use. Their task now was to get to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to fall upon them with the impetus that has carried this message of Jesus to millions upon millions of lives down through the ages.

Yet here is the bottom line:

Jesus in my view was the most impressive human being of all time. And in him we see evidence of God reaching out to humanity. And in these key events in his life a logical framework is built for belief that he was the Son of God. And his message is one of love, forgiveness, peace and hope. I love this whole package. I want to be part of it and bring that

to bear on the way the message continues to impact this broken world ... just think of that in terms of our Christchurch story over the last 10 years. As we emerged from the Global Financial Crisis of 2008/2009 we were devastated by earthquakes. Then last year by the shocking mosque massacre and now COVID. This city needs message of love, forgiveness, love and hope. And people like you and I to be bearers of this Christ message, to be the church that carries on the life of Christ.

Conclusion

At the beginning I talked about 6 key events in the Christological framework of the Bible. I have so far referred to 5 of them, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost. What is the 6th? It is the promise that comes at the end of our passage in Acts today:

“This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Much has been written about the second coming of Christ! By theologians and by popular prophets. Ultimately this is about the hope that God who was there at the very beginning of this amazing universe, will be there at the end. And that that ending will not be the finish, but rather the finishing touches to the Kingdom of God that Jesus heralded and God seeks to bring in time to its final consummation.

Notices

Final Prayer:²

God who cannot be bound
Flow into our hearts and minds
Wear down our resistance to your love
And refresh us with the spirit of your compassion

Today, as we commit ourselves once more to your work
We ask you to show us how to hold the needs of your world
At the heart of our lives
And to celebrate your many gifts with joy.

May your power transform our lives
May your Spirit set us free
And may the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be with us all now and for ever
Amen.

² Written by Linda Jones/CAFOD