

## Sunday after Ascension (Easter 7) 2015

Did you enjoy the reburial of Richard III down the road at Leicester? What a load of claptrap. Is that what the church is for now: heritage industry, pageantry, posh dresses, and anodyne addresses? That's what people seem to want. Is this worship of the past all that we're about. I hope not.

Evidently not for Jesus. In St John's account of Easter morning, he says to Mary Magdalene 'Don't cling to me, Mary, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.' I would be ashamed to confess how recently it dawned on me why this matters. I used to think that it was in Mary Magdalene's interest not to cling to Jesus, and couldn't work out why. Then I realized. It's not for her sake, but for his (which in the long run is hers, but bear with me). 'If you cling to me, you'll stop me doing what I have to do'. Not for Jesus any idea of sticking with the past or even the present, but for him—and it could have been said brusquely—'let go of me, I have work to do.' We've waited 40 days since Easter to celebrate the Ascension and now, thank God, we have done so with great joy. Life that has been on hold, as it were, for 5+ weeks now resumes. I'd like to look at the Ascension in three ways.

**First, the cosmic event.** At the incarnation, God takes human form and enters into all human experience. These events take place at one time and in one place. At the Ascension the Christ-event becomes available to the entire cosmos, unlimited by space and time. Outside time—*ex stasis*. The cosmos is redeemed.

**Second, the personal event.** God returns into the Godhead. God returns to Godself, goes deep inside himself. This is a model for the way we can journey into ourselves, a call to searing self-examination, the better to gain wisdom and insights in the service of others. Paradoxically the more one goes into oneself, the more one is free from oneself. It is painful, as the crucifixion was. The *blackening* of the forge (Jung's *nigredo*) before the transformation to new creation. Personal blackening, personal crucifixion, personal resurrection, personal ascension as we learn to fly—yes, fly. We become *unlimitedly* available for service to others, as Christ was *unlimited* by the Ascension. We do not impose ourselves on others, as Christ never did. It is a leaving behind of self, just as Christ left behind human flesh. An ascension beyond self.

**Third, the salvation event.** We are human beings. There is nothing shameful about this. If there were, why would the Ineffable God have taken the trouble to become one? At the Ascension all human experience was lifted up into the Godhead. The ascended Christ is the wounded Christ, the wounded healer, insulted, spat at, nailed, kicked, beaten, thirsty. By his wounds, we are healed. Through our woundedness we can act as channels of healing for others. We do not need to pretend to be what we're not—that's the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden where they tried to cover up who they were. Humanity with all its imperfections is divinized: 'God became man so that man might become divine'—the interpenetration of divine and human. Rising above is always a metaphor for release, for a yearning (eros) for better things. Such yearnings are part of the human condition. The abused people I have dealt with ache for better things, and look forward to a better life. Ascension as something to aim for.

### So what?

*God became man in order to raise man to God.* Christ takes human-ness to the Divine Godhead. The Ascension unites earth to heaven, humanness to divinity: sanctification, divinization, redemption, theosis, call it what you will. We are too obsessed with the puritan mentality of the BCP, miserable sinners and so on. We wallow too much in self-flagellation. This is self-obsession, a kind of inverted pride. We are obsessed with what we are saved *from*. We need to lift our eyes to what we are saved *to*: glory and splendour of Ascension.

This is why we need the Ascension: to rekindle, restore, our sense of hope in a world where we hear and see too much of the nastiness of humanity, where we hear of people who ignore that longing for the divine, who shut it out. We need this when we hear the bad news that the media seem to like to concentrate on and when, as I have this week, been dealing with people for whom life is not worth living.

*God the Logos became what we are, in order that we may become what he himself is. The glory of God is a living person and the life of man is the vision of God.*

The mission Jesus gave the apostles was a simple one. It was to teach others what he had taught them. And what are *you* going to do about it?

*You write a new page of the gospel each day,  
through the things that you do and the words that you say.  
People will read what you write, whether faithful or true.  
What is the gospel according to you?*

Let's put heaven on earth. Let's ascend to new possibilities. Let's do what we can to enable others ascend to the heights of humanity. This is sharing in divinity.

*What is the gospel according to you? Mine is life abundant, not life resisting.*