

SUNDAY 9TH MAY EASTER 6

Thought for the Week:

"Ascension Day: is it still relevant for today's faith?"

This coming Thursday (13th May) sees the celebration of Ascension Day, the day set aside to remember when the risen Jesus, after spending forty days with the disciples following His resurrection on Easter Day, "was taken up before the disciples' eyes and was hid from their sight by a cloud." (Acts 1:9)

Hence, from earliest times, the Church has celebrated this day and called it "Ascension Day" based on Jesus' 'ascending' into heaven to sit at the right hand of God and in 325AD the Ascension of Jesus was included as a key statement of our faith in what was known as the Nicene Creed.



But is such a belief still credible and indeed relevant for the twenty-first century? It's hard enough being credible as a Christian today in most circles as it is, isn't having to stick with believing in Jesus somehow being transported 'upward' into the sky like someone out of Star Trek simply just begging for us to become even more irrelevant and a 'laughing stock'?

Well, approaching it simply from a "twenty-first century – literalist" perspective quite possibly, and in fairness artists, not really knowing how to go about depicting the events of what actually happened, haven't necessarily helped much, as often it has been these images that have tended to dictate how we interpret things because they give us instant pictures rather than maybe taking the time to look and think what the Bible and the early Christians might actually be wanting to try and say about how they understood Jesus' 'Ascension.'



Last Sunday (2nd May) saw thirteen million people, twenty per cent of the country, tune in to watch the finale of the TV crime detective series "Line of Duty." Viewers responses to how it concluded were 'mixed,' but according to my good lady, who is an ardent fan, when you look back through the various preceding series you can see the person accused of being the secret 'mole' was there visible but invisible all the time. You just needed to follow the evidence.

When we apply the same 'detective' style approach with the story of the Ascension and look carefully at what Luke records in Acts 1, then new light begins to dawn.

The ‘key,’ in some ways, is given in the words of the two angels who spoke to the disciples following Jesus’ ascension. In Acts 1:11, they are reported as saying, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

What’s so striking about these words? They seem, surely, simply to confirm what we already think is happening. Except that, apart from Elijah, who rode his chariot into heaven (2Kings 2) and a rather more vague reference as to what happened to Enoch in the book of Genesis (Genesis 5:21-24), the only other reference as to someone being taken up into heaven as a physical human being is quite specific – the Book of Daniel ch 7:13-14.



What’s interesting about Daniel 7:13-14, is that Daniel’s vision describes, not so much him seeing someone leaving earth and being taken up into heaven, as Daniel already being in heaven and seeing God the Father, (who Daniel describes as the “Ancient of Days”) welcoming a physical human being, who came from the earth on the clouds, and takes the throne as King next to God Himself – see Daniel 7:14: “He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

So, who is this “physical human being” of Daniel’s vision? This is where it gets technical, but please go with it. Again, the text is quite specific. In our English Bibles we translate the name of this person as “one like the Son of Man.” But this part of Daniel’s text was written in Aramaic (the native language to Upper Galilee) rather than conventional Hebrew script, experts know this. In Hebrew script “son of man” is “ben adam” – and can mean “a man,” “a physical human being,” or even “human beings” (plural). But Daniel 7 is in Aramaic, and here the phrase “THE Son of Man” is “bar enasha,” and only appears here in Daniel, and means something quite different from the more general “ben adam.” “Bar enasha” means “The Perfect Human,” “the One,” “the Messiah” – “God’s anointed.”

(ברֶן־אָנָשׁ, *bar enasha*)

(בֵּן־אָדָם, *ben adam*)

Interestingly, the term “bar enasha” – “THE Son of Man” is associated seventy-eight times in the New Testament, sixty of those times by Jesus Himself. In fact, it is the ‘key phrase’ Jesus uses of Himself more than any other – and it is distinct and specific, Jesus saw Himself as the fulfilment of Daniel ch 7, without question (See Prof Barnabas Lindars SSF paper 1985 – a remarkable Anglican Franciscan brother who was also Prof of the Theology

Dept at Manchester University and who wrote a book with the not surprising title, “Jesus, Son of Man”).

Why does any of this matter, outside of those who might be interested in these sorts of things?

Because, the Ascension of Jesus for those first disciples and for the early Christian Church wasn't so much about “Jesus being ‘teleported’ out of here, up into the sky,” it was about “God fulfilling in Jesus His ancient prophecy” and Jesus, right from the beginning being seen as “God's anointed King” and Lord of all time: “His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:14)

Which, at the time of Jesus, meant that the Emperor in Rome, who was the most powerful person on the planet from a human perspective, and who also called himself “lord,” was not. Indeed, the wider vision from Daniel ch 7 talks about ‘four wild beasts’ who will be ‘held to account’ by the Son of Man. These ‘wild beasts’ were generally regarded as being the empires of the world at the time of Daniel. It is not unsurprising that John, the author of the Book of Revelation, another book of visions, picks up the same imagery as Daniel, and sees now Rome, and indeed all political powers, as being, along with other empires, similarly held to account by The Son of Man.

And that includes all political leaders and business leaders, and Church leaders and indeed Churches, who will be held to account against the measure of Jesus and the Kingdom message He came to bring.

And the measure that we will be held up, and against which we will be measured is, love.

We need to think about this with regard to the decisions that the G7 will be making next month in Cornwall, as to whether to share the vaccine for Co-Vid with poorer nations.

We need to think about this with regard to the COP26 Conference in Glasgow in November on Climate Change and on caring for the Planet.

We need to think about this with regard to how our national, regional and local political leaders choose to exercise their political power following the elections this last week.

We need to realise we too will be held to account, both individually and as Churches, as to legacy we ourselves leave behind during ‘our watch.’

No one, and no organisation is exempt, from the most powerful to the least, from those who claim to be the most holy to those who would say they were adamantly atheist.

All of us will meet the same Judge and face the same ‘measure.’

In the time of those early Christians this was seen as remarkably “Good News.” Of course, those who sought to suppress their views and beliefs “laughed” and carried on oppressing, even slaughtering them all the same.

There will be those today who will pretty much seek to do the same.

But rather than the Ascension of Jesus being about Him leaving us down here for a “sunnier” clime elsewhere, Ascension is actually all about this world, including us, discovering the infinite and all-pervasive truth, “Jesus is THE ‘bar enasha’ – THE Lord” and His ‘Lordship’ is a lordship of LOVE, both something no one can do anything about, and to which, and to whom, we will all have to give account.

On that basis, celebrating Ascension Day, comes with a sharp edge to it, and is just as much needed and relevant today as it was two thousand years ago.



Matt Thomson

New Creation Celebration of Ascension Day – Thursday 13th May

The image consists of two side-by-side photographs. On the left is a photograph of Cadbury Hill, showing a green landscape with buildings and trees in the foreground. On the right is a stylized graphic of a sunburst or clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and blue.

Live-stream from
Cadbury Hill at 10.30am

Ascension Day
Thursday 13th May

You are welcome to join us [online](#) for a special Ascension Day service at

10.30am on Thursday 13th May

It is a pleasant walk up Cadbury Hill with a beautiful view. We will be setting out from the car park at 10am and after the service will nip to Heather's for a late breakfast/early lunch.
(Seating outside, socially distanced)



Live Stream from Cadbury Hill at 10.30am. Matt, Kirsty and George (Vicar and tech support) will be setting out from the car park at 10am. We use this spot (see image) every year for the view over Congresbury, Banwell and Puxton, meaning we can bless each of the New Creation villages.

We cannot invite you to join us physically as we will not be on Church grounds, however, if you happened to be walking on Cadbury Hill at the same time, socially distanced, of course, it would be lovely to see you.



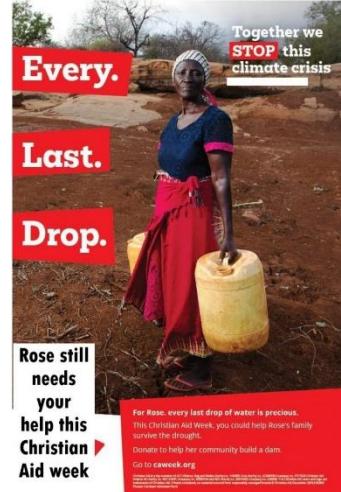
Our Worship next Sunday (Sunday 16th May), physically and online, will be all about Christian Aid and their campaign this year to raise awareness of the “Injustice to the Poorest” of Climate Change – Banwell at 10.30am

This last year has been a really tough year for many charities, and Christian Aid is no exception. But, as well as seeking to raise funds for many projects around the globe, Christian Aid also seeks to raise awareness and encourage people to engage in some of the big issues.

So, next Sunday we will be doing just that, so please join us either physically or online.

If you would like to look up about Christian Aid Week for 2021, please click on the link below.

<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/appeals/key-appeals/christian-aid-week>



Matt Thomson



“Thy Kingdom Come” Prayer Initiative (13th - 23rd May) – Ascension Day to Pentecost:

This is a time set aside by the whole Anglican Church to pray, for the coming of the Spirit and for the needs of the world in the light of God’s Kingdom.

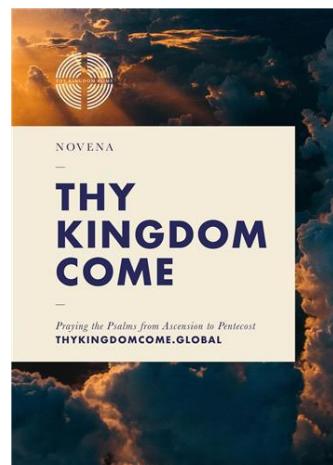
You can join in either by picking up one of the Booklets that we hope will arrive during the week, so pick one up from either Church (probably as from Wednesday).

Alternatively, if you do technology, you can download “The App” to your smartphone or Tablet and have all the prayers and the talks at your fingertips.

New for this year, you can also download the books from the Thy Kingdom Come website and they also have ‘prayer journals’ available to download as well as other downloadable resources and videos. Click on the link below to find these new features and navigate the Thy Kingdom Come website.

<https://www.thykingdomcome.global/resources/new-2021>

Matt Thomson



Annual Church Meetings - CHANGE OF DATES:

Both our Churches' Annual Meetings (APCMs) are due this month. For various reasons we have needed to change the dates of these.

Congresbury will now be on **Wed 26th May**

Banwell will now be on **Thursday 27th May**

At present both (due to Government guidelines) both of these meetings will need to be **online**, using Zoom, although if we get further advice we will let everyone know just as soon as we can.

Annual Reports should be coming out shortly.

Zoom links for the meetings will be published in next week's Pew News.

Matt Thomson

"Annual Church Meetings" (Online):



**"St Andrews,
Congresbury" –
Wed 26th May**

Contact Andrea at
the Church Office
for more details.



**"St Andrews,
Banwell" –
Thurs 27th May**