

Bible Study for the week of Sunday, 24th May

This week we consider the complex idea of Jesus' ascension.

1. Before you start, what does the phrase 'the glory of God' mean to you? We use it often but what are we really talking about?
2. Next read the passages and the commentary. Does 'the glory of God' mean anything different to you now?
3. What does it mean for Jesus to be 'glorified in' us?
4. We can tie ourselves in knots trying to explain what happened to Jesus at his ascension. It may be more helpful to ask; 'What happened to the disciples as a result of the ascension?' Take a look at the three artistic representations. Do you find any of them particularly helpful or unhelpful? Why?
5. What do you feel our own church community should take most to heart from these 2 readings?

Acts 1:6-14

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."

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of [a] James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Tom Wright on the Ascension (*Twelve Months of Sundays*)

It is vital to remember that the ascended Lord is precisely the one who was crucified. In John’s Gospel, indeed, crucifixion and exaltation seem to be merged together, so that the ascension does not ‘reveal his glory’ any more fully than the cross itself.

Without this, Acts 1 would simply be a triumphalist rant. In Luke’s readers’ world, the way Roman emperors were formally declared divine after their deaths was to have someone declare that they had seen him ascend into heaven. Ascension was the instrument of power and glory: the power of the Roman state to keep subject peoples controlled with religious, as much as military, threat; the glory of the imperial system and the all-powerful person at the top of it.

For Luke, however, as the whole of Acts makes clear, the fact that it was the crucified Jesus who was now exalted to share the throne of the one true God (he has Daniel 7 in mind as well) means that the mission of his followers will carry power, and indeed glory, but of a very different sort. It will be the power, and the glory, of suffering love.

Peter Rogers:
The Ascension
Here, it seems a powerful sense of divine presence remains central.



Kulmbach: The Ascension of Christ

The almost comical reduction of Jesus to merely his suspended feet perhaps now forces our attention onto the disciples.



The Rabbula Icon

This depicts Mary as the 'God-bearer', Peter with his martyr's cross, and even Paul, who certainly would not have been present at the Ascension but who would become such a key builder of the early church.

