

Sermon for 2017 Yr A Easter 7  
Preached Sunday 5/28/2017 at St. James', Mount Vernon  
By the Rev. Charles F. Brock

This past Thursday the church observed the Day of the Ascension. Oh, really, you might say... I hadn't noticed.

And I won't fault you for not noticing. Ascension is an event in the life of the church that doesn't get too much traction in the United States. I was talking with a friend about Ascension, and she said, "on yeah, Ascension is one of those Mary things, isn't it."

Well, Ascension is not about Mary, it is about Jesus. And when something is about Jesus, it's about us, too.

The tradition of the church teaches that after that first Easter Sunday, when the resurrected Jesus first appeared to his disciples, he remained with them for 40 days, teaching them and forming them. The resurrected Jesus didn't just make a single dramatic appearance... he spent quality time with his disciples.

But on the 40th day, Jesus took his disciples out and blessed them, and then he was bodily lifted up into the clouds, leaving everyone standing with their heads tipped back and their mouths gaping open.

This is the Ascension, Jesus' departure from his disciples in order to return to his Father, to return to the place and the relationship from which he had originally come.

I think this is a confusing moment, because we've been taught that Jesus is always with us, in an immediate and personal way. How do we reckon that with the Ascension, in which Jesus goes away from his disciples and us?

The main way that the Church explains this, is that Jesus departed bodily, so that he could then be with us all in spirit, through the Holy Spirit.

But I think that Jesus also left us in order to make it possible for us to fully receive and grow into the life and faith that he came to give.

During Jesus' time on earth, the disciples were like schoolchildren. They followed and were taught by their master, most often without understanding what was being said.

Had Jesus not left, the disciples would have remained in this dependent and passive role.

But in ascending, departing from us, Jesus freed us to live into the full potential of the life that he had brought us.

Jesus trusted us and empowered us to find our own ways of expressing the truth of his life... and he commissioned us to live in that truth, to share the Gospel, to announce the coming of God's kingdom.

When we become Christians, we are not automatically or immediately adults in Christ. We may have a relationship with Jesus without fully comprehending the significance and implications of that relationship.

Our relationship with Jesus nurtures us, even while we still have much growing up to do in the faith, so much to learn and to understand.

Jesus stayed with his disciples for forty days AFTER his resurrection, instructing them and teaching them. And then they STILL wanted to know if this is the time when he would restore the kingdom to Israel—they still were thinking in the old ways.

But Jesus knew that they were ready to receive the Holy Spirit, and that he needed to leave them so that they could receive it.

Jesus departed so that we too can know the Holy Spirit. He departed so that we could continue to grow, so that we would not remain children in Jesus, but that we might become adults in Christ.

By his ascension, Jesus makes it possible for us to be not only children of God, but to also be his brothers and sisters, filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit and empowered to do even greater things than he himself has done.

Amen.

During these days between Ascension and Pentecost next Sunday, we are participating in the Archbishop of Canterbury's call to pray that Thy Kingdom Come. Each day we are invited to spend a few moments praying for the coming kingdom, and for the way in which we are part of God's Kingdom, and for the ways in which we may hasten its coming. The prayers of the people that we used this morning came from the office of the Archbishop. And you can still sign up to receive a brief daily reflection by visiting the website listed in the service bulletin.