**ACTS 1:4-14 Our Ascended King**

During the week, on Thursday to be precise, the liturgical Christian church throughout the world celebrated Ascension Day. This is the day in the Christian calendar when we remember the Ascension of Christ to his throne in heaven.

We are pretty good at celebrating the death of Christ and his resurrection, but when it comes to the Ascension, it somehow doesn’t get the press it deserves. It seems the church suffers from a form of ADD – not attention deficit disorder – rather ASCENSION deficit disorder.

Yet without the Ascension, the Christian message is incomplete!

So what does the Ascension really mean for us?

1. **First, the Ascension means that Christ’s mission on earth was accomplished.**

Jesus died to take away our sin; he rose again in victory, to vanquish death & satan; and he ascended into heaven to rule at his Father’s right hand - which means that if Jesus has done it all, there is nothing else we have to do to bring about our salvation. That takes the pressure off, doesn’t it?

So often in the church’s history, Christians have been falsely taught that it is Christ’s work PLUS something else which ensures their salvation. In our era, when we pride ourselves on being well educated & theologically sound, we may think that we are not subject to the subtle heresy of adding to the Gospel message. But even we can get sucked in!

How often have Christians been told that unless they adhere to the teachings of their denomination, they cannot be saved; or unless they believe in a certain theological perspective, say, concerning baptism, or speaking in tongues, or how creation happened - they are heretics, or if they don’t give 10% of their income and have a regular quiet time, their salvation is at risk?

Note this well – when Jesus ascended to heaven, it was all DONE – his work on earth was finished. There is nothing we can add to his work!

As a young high school student, before I became a Christian, I had somewhere acquired the belief that if I didn’t give thanks to God in prayer every day, he would be displeased with me and I might even go to hell. So I used to pray every night, without fail, a great long prayer of thanksgiving. I’d start at the mountaintops and work down to the sea, thanking God for everything I could think of. It took a long time. It was a burden. I wanted out, but felt really guilty if I skipped it. I was living under a law that someone had placed on me – the law being I had to believe in God, PLUS say this long prayer every night or I wouldn’t be saved.

When I came to Christ, and I asked about prayer – I discovered that my great long evening prayer of thanksgiving was not a requirement of becoming a child of God. Of course I still prayed – but it was *because* I was accepted by God – and how could I not talk to him? I was no longer praying *in order* to become accepted!! Such freedom!

1. **The second thing the Ascension means for us is that it opened the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit!**

While Christ’s work of gaining our salvation was completed with his death, resurrection & ascension, the work of establishing his Kingdom is still in progress.

Prior to the coming of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was only given to certain people at certain times for certain tasks. Then in Joel chapter 2, the prophet predicts a time when God’s spirit will be poured out on ‘all flesh’.

In John 16:7 Jesus is preparing his disciples for his impending death and gives them this assurance, “…. I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

In our reading from Acts this morning, Luke frames his account of the establishment of the early church by reminding his readers of this promise of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit, He quotes Jesus words: "This is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." And then in v8 “…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."

With those words, Jesus was lifted up and taken from their sight. He ascended into heaven, to sit the right hand of his Father.

The disciples didn’t have long to wait. As Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit came upon his church at Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit equips the church to carry the message of salvation to a lost world. He is also constantly at work in us to make us more like Jesus. He is our counsellor, advocate and guide; he empowers us and teaches us, and reveals Jesus to us.

I know we will all have stories to tell of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. I could tell many stories as well, but I’ll share this one, because it’s a bit quirky, and shows that the Holy Spirit is at work in even the little things in our lives…..

When I was at Teachers college, one of my best mates was a guy called Steve. We were both guitarists, and taught classes together at Woollahrah primary school. He was always ribbing me because I was a Christian. One day I’d had a real battle with hiccups. I’d hiccupped all through the morning’s lectures and I was getting really fed up. They just wouldn’t stop. We got our lunch from the canteen, and as we sat down, I said a quick prayer, asking the Lord to PLEASE take away the hiccups.

Steve noticed, and said mockingly, “You were *praying* about your hiccups just then, weren’t you? Don’t be stupid – if there’s a God, he doesn’t give a hoot about your hiccups!” – and he sat back and grinned at me.

It was one of those Holy Spirit moments! A rock solid conviction took hold of me that I didn’t even question. “Steve,” I said, looking straight at him, “There won’t be one more hiccup!”

There was this tense silence as we both waited….and there wasn’t one more hiccup! It really spooked him! I can still see the expression on his face. I’ll never know the end result of how God might have used that – but I know beyond doubt, that the Holy Spirit got involved in that small event to glorify Jesus, and testify to his love for us.

Without the Ascension, there would be no work of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the believer’s life.

1. **Thirdly, the Ascension means that Jesus our King will return to consummate his kingdom.**

In Acts 1:10-11 says, “While (Jesus) was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

They 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."

When Jesus ascended into heaven, he ascended to enter the glory of his Father, and to reign as King.

Jesus our King has commissioned us, his followers, with a task. That task is to share the good news that people can be forgiven and set right with God through his death, resurrection & ascension. We are commanded to love each other and the world, and to bring healing & peace in his name. Our king has equipped his church – us – with everything we need to carry out that task. And this task must be fulfilled before he returns.

Now let’s not get confused about this – we aren’t given this charge in order to be made acceptable to God. It should never be something we do out of guilt or fear. We are given this charge as an enormous privilege. God invites us to partner with the King of heaven, to establish his kingdom. He doesn’t really *need* our help in this. He *chooses* to share this task with us.

Someone once asked me what gave me the greatest joy in life (Interesting question, that.) I knew the answer straight away. It was – and still is – being able to introduce someone to Jesus and to help them get to know him.

A few years ago in my previous parish, the 88 year old warden of one of the centres had a heart attack and was rushed to St Vincent’s hospital. His name was Ben. When I first arrived in the parish, Ben & his wife invited me to dinner. After we had exchanged pleasantries over the meal, he leaned across the table and said, “I’m an agnostic, you know!”

“Oh,” I said, somewhat surprised. “An agnostic warden, huh?” He went on to tell me that the church had been built on his grandfather’s property and bequeathed to the church, and there had always been a Rose – that was his surname – as warden. He took his responsibility seriously, but didn’t feel that belief needed to go with it.

And now Ben was in hospital. I was due to go on leave, and by God’s design I’m sure, I was spending a week in Sydney, so I went to see Ben before I settled in to where I was staying. The first thing he said to me as I entered his room was, “I’m an agnostic, you know!”

Despite this profession of agnosticism, I sensed a yearning for God underneath. We chatted for a while about this, and then I asked him gently, “Ben, would you like to become a Christian?” He said “Yes, I think I would,” and I had the incredible privilege of praying with him as he gave his life to Jesus.

The next morning, Ben told his son, who was a keen Christian and lay leader in our church, what he had done. His son was over the moon. Sadly, Ben died a week later. But he died knowing he was a child of God.

That is the privilege we are invited to share.

When the time is right, Jesus, our ascended king, will return to our world to bring in the culmination of his kingdom. Without the Ascension, there would be no kingdom.

Let me conclude with a verse from Revelation 22 which is a prayer of the Holy Spirit, and the Bride of Christ (which is us – the church).

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes, take the water of life as a gift.

May we join in this prayer to our ascended King. “Come Lord Jesus.”

Let’s pray…