

Today is the Sunday after the Ascension; -- the feast of the Ascension was Thursday--- and this year in Acts, we hear Luke tell the story of the risen Lord's departure from his disciples. There's a lot in the lessons, today. Personally, I think the angel's comment to the disciples is one of the more pointed calls to action in the New Testament.. "Why are you standing around looking up in the air?" (and of course implied, "when there's stuff to do..") But I wanted to talk to you a little bit about The Ascension. It's not the best known of the feast days on the calendar, but it has its moments:

When I was rector of Saint James in Laconia, New Hampshire, The ascension was always the occasion for a potluck and a performance by the Junior High School Youth – a reenactment of the ascension. This event took place in the parish hall, with kids in bathrobes – kind of a reverse Christmas Pageant, if you will – and the key feature was an eyebolt fastened to a beam in the ceiling and Jesus ascending with the help of a harness, a pulley and cable with several hefty Junior High School kids doing the hoisting. The excitement came one year, when the harness worn by the designated Jesus of the year parted -- leaving said Jesus hanging by one arm 15 feet above the floor screaming, "Oh my God, I'm going to die." My prayers were prayers of thanksgiving for the Church Insurance Company. And thereafter we joked about the Ascension being a bit of the human and a bit of the divine..

There's an idea that the Ascension embodies that's important:

Now, the first thing to get clear about the Ascension -- regardless of cables and pulley, and the like -- is that it is not about up or down or gravity, or the physical location of heaven, or any of that. It is about God. In fact, even though it comes toward the end of the Easter season, the Ascension is most closely related, in meaning, to Christmas. At Christmas we celebrate the Incarnation, God becoming flesh and living among us. The divine becoming human. What we say today is that what was begun at Christmas is brought full circle, and proclaimed again in a different way, at the Ascension.

At the Incarnation, at Christmas, what it means to be God became fully a part of what it means to be a human being. In Jesus, the human and the divine become united in the person and life of one man. That's Christmas.

At the Ascension, this human being - the person and the resurrected body of Jesus-became a part of who God is. The life of a single, individual human being is forever joined to the life of God the Father, the one who created the heavens and the earth. A bit of the human – a bit of the divine.

It is important to remember that it was not the spirit of Jesus, or the essence of Jesus, or the divine nature of Jesus, or the invisible part of Jesus, or the idea of Jesus, or anything like that, that ascended to the Father. It was the resurrected body of Jesus: a body that the disciples had

touched, a body that ate and drank with them, a real, physical, but gloriously restored body-bearing the marks of nails and a spear. This is what ascended. This is what, now and forever, is a living, participating part of God. Think about it.. It says something about who God is and about who we are.

It is important to really think about that event, think about what it says about being human. Sometimes those of us who are involved with the life of the church are uncertain about the value of our humanity. We have a (sometimes deserved) reputation for being uncomfortable or even embarrassed about much that characterizes being human, things like the reality of our bodies and our appetites, the fact that we are finite, and limited; the fact of our mortality and the certainty of our death; the painful difficulty we have in relationships; the struggles, joys, and setbacks that always seem to be a part of our quest for God; and the power that our feelings and emotions have over us. All of these parts of being human, and so many others, we frequently treat as less than holy, as somehow divorced from our spiritual and religious lives, even as bad things we should not have. *(A number of heresies have grown from our discomfort with our humanity; so has a lot of pain.)*

The Ascension, along with the Incarnation, is here to tell us that it is a good thing to be a human being; indeed it is a wonderful and an important and a holy thing to be a human being. It is such an important thing that God did it. Even more, the fullness of God now includes what it means to be a human being. The experience, the reality, and the stuff of being a person is so valuable that God has made it a part of God's life.

This is not to say that everything about us as people is wonderful and holy; and we can certainly not imagine that everything we human beings do is wonderful and holy. But it is very clear that in the eyes of God it is a wonderful and a holy thing to be a human being. This is one reason we should treat ourselves, and one another, with care and with great respect. The Ascension, the fact that God has brought into himself one who is fully human, this can remind us that simply being a human being is a sacred thing, never to be abused or taken lightly.

Another thing the Ascension means is that God knows what it is like to be a person in a very different way than God knows what it means to be anything else. God knows what it is like to be a human being because, and there seems to be no better way of expressing it, God remembers what it is like to be a person.

When we approach God, when we consider God, and when in prayer, we try to share our lives with God, it is important to remember that we are dealing with one who remembers -- and who does not just know abstractly what our lives are like. God remembers what it is like to hurt and to laugh, to pray and to hunger, to be lost and afraid, to celebrate and to mourn; God remembers what it is like to live and what it is like to die. God knows this, and God

knows this in the only way that really matters as far as relationship is concerned. God knows because God has been there.

So we are able to approach God, to reach out to God and to look for the presence and will of God, with confidence and with joy. For as we turn toward God, we are not only dealing with the creator of the universe and the ruler of all time and of eternity; we are also drawing near to the one who lived our life and who has shared our fate. We are coming near to one who knows us and who cares. We are coming home.

Through Jesus Christ, we are coming home.

Amen