



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

Sunday, May 20, 2007

### Easter 7 Ascension

About 6 weeks ago we gathered in church on a Saturday evening for a service. Very unEpiscopalian, but the night was Holy Saturday, and we gathered for the great vigil of Easter. The first thing that happened at that service was the lighting of the new paschal candle. It signified to us the light of Christ. Christ has risen. At every service since then the candle has burned to signify that after the resurrection of Jesus he appeared openly for 40 days to his disciples in bodily form.

This past Thursday, Ascension day, we shared a most beautiful service with music by William Byrd, in the chapel. After the reading of the gospel the Paschal candle was extinguished because the 40 days were over, and Jesus ascended into heaven. God did not want His Son to stay around and appear at various times. It was important that the work be now left to the Holy Spirit, and so Jesus ascends into heaven.

There is a wonderful legend about Jesus arriving back in heaven.

When he got there he still showed the deep stripes on his back where he had been flogged, the marks of the nails on his hands and feet where he was crucified, the deep wound on his side where he was speared, and the marks on his head from the crown of thorns.

When the people in heaven saw the marks they fell on their knees because they were astounded at just how much Jesus had suffered.

The angel Gabriel was the first to speak, and he asked Jesus "Lord do all the people on earth know and appreciate how much you went through for them to show how much you love them?"

Jesus said "No. Only a handful of people in Palestine know that. The rest haven't even heard of me. They do not know who I am, and they know nothing about me."

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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Gabriel was shocked to hear this. So he asked Jesus, "How will the rest of the people on earth ever know about your suffering and your love?"

Jesus said, "Just before I left, I told Peter and John and James and a few of their friends to tell as many people as they can, and they in turn will tell other people who will tell other people, and in that way eventually the whole world will get to know about my love for them."

Now the archangel Gabriel considered himself much older than Jesus, and he smiled a little. You see Gabriel felt experienced in his knowledge of people. Gabriel knew how fickle people are. He knew how forgetful they can be. He knew how prone to doubt they are.

So Gabriel asked Jesus, "What happens if Peter, John, James, or their friends grow tired or frustrated. What if they forget about you. What if they have doubts about you. And even if they do come through, what happens if the people they tell experience the same things? Did you take these things into account? Do you have a back up plan?"

Jesus told Gabriel. "I took all this into account, but I decided against any back up plan. This is the only plan I have. I am counting on Peter, James and John, their friends, and who they tell not to let me down."

21 centuries later, Jesus still has no other plan. He counted on, He trusted Peter, James, John, and their friends, and now he counts on and trusts us.

I believe that we are Christians because somebody at some time told us some thing about God and Jesus. It was passed on to us, and we are asked to be the ones to pass it on.

I also believe that the best way is not by threatening or by guilt, not by hollering Biblical passages to support

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who is right or who is wrong, not by becoming the shepherd who separates sheep from goats, and not by threatening eternal damnation to those who disagree with us. .

I believe that the way we live out the teachings of Jesus, founded on love, tells people about Jesus. I believe the way we begin to preach Jesus is to first of all preach him to ourselves.

There is an old Chinese proverb that says;

“If there is right in the soul there will be beauty in the person.

If there is beauty in the person their will be harmony in the home

If there is harmony in the home there will be order in the nation

If there is order in the nation there will be peace in the world.”

The only way to begin to preach Jesus is to preach him to ourselves and begin to live what we learn. We cannot talk about, we cannot live that which we do not know.

Once we begin to live Jesus in our lives then the message of Jesus begins to ripple out to others.

The message of Ascension day is Jesus is counting on us.

He has no one else.

just us

Amen.

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