

CHRIST ASCENDED BUT NOT ABSENT 24/5/20, Matthew 28: 16-20; Acts 1:1-11

What do we today make of Christ's Ascension, 40 days after Easter? For the 1st disciples it was confusion again: "What now!" "Where do we look for Christ our King?" and "What's going on?" - questions as much for us in 2020 & for disciples in AD 30

It is hard to picture: a mixture of Captain Kirk – *Beam me up, Scottie!* - and of Dr. Who with his or her phone box dematerialising until next series or...All inadequate picture but the passages do teach us:

- 1) **The person we see in Jesus Christ is part of the godhead** that is over & above the universe – but as hymns today remind us – God who is not remote or detached or unaware of all it means to be human or unloving but remains Jesus. Matt. 28:16ff – *All authority has been given to me.....*
- 2) **Message of the two men in white / angels – God's messengers: *Stop gawping /*** staring up into the sky, into space looking for Jesus and for inspiration. **Follow my instructions – JUST DO WHAT I TOLD YOU;** (Jesus had given His disciples some clear commands and promises and directions: Look at them yourself and ending with "*You go & wait for the Spirit, the power I will give you and you will be witnesses for me...*") That all happened after Pentecost 10 days later.
- 3) In Matthew 28:17, we are told that ***even though some*** - like many of us too today - **doubted, Jesus still told them, "*All authority in heaven & earth has been given to me. Therefore you go & make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, of the Son & of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. and surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age.*"** **All** authority...make disciples of **all** nations... teaching them to obey **all** I have commanded you...& I will be with you **always**...
- 4) William Temple, who was Archbishop of Canterbury in 1940's wrote, "***The Ascension of Christ is His liberation from all restrictions of time & space. It does not represent His removal from earth but His constant presence everywhere on earth.***" Like loved ones we are separated from at this time – Out of sight, out of touch but not out of mind. **Ascension is not a call to look upwards; it is call to trust that Christ's promise and presence is down – and in –and around - and amongst us. Seeking to be aware of Jesus at work is not the same thing as focusing on earthly things.** Often we can best ***focus on things above*** (Colossians 3:2) by looking to where Jesus is active all around us; and to where and how He wants us to put our faith in practice here and now, and then to play our part in building up of God's Kingdom, making a difference for Christ's sake and sharing His gracious love and truth by our actions and attitudes as well as our prayers..
We pray *Thy kingdom come....on earth....*when and how is up to God Christ will return in glory to judge the world. In the meantime, may we recognise His rule and living presence in our lives and live lives that show that. AMEN