

In the reading tonight from the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, we see that after His Resurrection, Jesus remained with the disciples for 40 days, teaching them of the Kingdom of God. The reading continues, “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, ‘Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?’ ”

We see in their question, that the disciples are somehow still missing an important adjustment to their worldview, to their fundamental frame of reference. They are still imagining a restoration of the Davidic or Solomonic Kingdom. They obviously believe that if Jesus previously could work miracles before His resurrection, that He is even more invincible now that He has taken up immortality. They had the New Humanity in their presence—could any enemy oppose Him? So to them, this seems like the perfect time to make a move against the Roman occupiers.

However, what the disciples had failed to grasp was that Christ’s resurrection wasn’t the end of God’s plan for humanity. Their question about restoring the Kingdom to Israel, revealed that they didn’t understand that they themselves must still be fundamentally changed. God’s plan was not to leave them burdened by their sinful natures. Sin must be purged from humanity, not just by Christ’s redemption for their sins, but by actually bringing humanity to holiness through spiritual renewal, eventually leading to physical renewal. Our inner lives, comprised of our thoughts, feelings, and emotions, must be renewed not only in our being, but also through our behavior. We are called to live in holiness even as we had been made holy. God’s mercy had been shed upon us through Christ’s sacrifice, but we also need to receive God’s grace, therefore becoming agents of that grace ourselves.

The point here is that the disciples’ imaginations were limited through their preconceptions. They were thinking in terms of life as it was, not in terms of the new life of Christ. They didn’t understand, even while in the presence of the resurrected Jesus, that they would be spiritually changed, for they would become the very temple of God. The Spirit of God would take up residence within them so that the hearts that were dead through Adam’s sin, would be made alive once again unto God. They would become a new creation. Their bodies, as ours, will be like Christ’s body. The temporal rule that the disciples craved did not encompass a grand enough vision. It was still the vision of limited man, not the vision of the eternal God.

Christ was interested in implementing this grander vision – the renewal of all humanity for which the disciples were to be the initial carriers of this gift to the world. He told them that they would receive the power of God so they should remain in Jerusalem. They would have their spirits renewed by the presence of God IN THEM. Christ Ascended and sent the Holy

Ghost to begin this renewal of the world.

Could this renewal have taken place had Christ not ascended? It is fair to say that the renewal of the divine spirit within us wouldn't have been the same had Christ not ascended. We are saved through the sealing of the Holy Ghost, but are also progressively being saved as we encounter life in this world and learn to respond in faith to it. We are being sanctified here and now by the trials of life, by participation in the Body of Christ, and by the promptings of the Spirit of God in us.

And let us remember also that Christ has not abandoned the world in His Ascension. It is, in fact, just the opposite for we are the continuing presence of Christ in this world. We take the Spirit of Christ with us where ever we go, proclaiming Christ and the love of God for humanity through our lives and our actions, and yes, even sometimes through our words. We are to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us. It is mainly through us that the Ascended Christ reigns in this world. Certainly He has the prerogative to answer prayer miraculously or to send angels to protect or to guide, but most generally, Christ works in the world through the obedience of His transformed followers – that is through you and I.

The Ascension of Christ is therefore the Feast of the Reigning Christ, and this is why it is our Patronal Feast Day at Christ the King Anglican Church. Christ is not a disconnected or unconcerned monarch who issues commands at whim regardless of the impact on His subjects. Rather He loves both His people and also those outside of the Kingdom, and works in the world to bring in all who would come. You and I have the privilege to be redeemed by Christ, transformed by the Spirit, and incorporated into the Godhead through Jesus. We have the privilege to be part of the eternal plan of God to renew creation.

So it is critically important to not overlook the Ascension of Christ. Salvation is more than simply Christ's death and resurrection. It includes all of the actions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in creation. It includes the entire story of humanity and God's actions before the incarnation. It includes God entering into Creation through Christ and God's activity in the world every moment that has been and every moment that will be. Nothing happens that is out of God's sustaining hand. No event is a surprise to God, but all of it reveals the depth of God's love for us and His unfathomable wisdom. And, let us still be amazed that we, you and I, each one of us individually and in concert with the believers of all ages, are part of this story. We matter because Christ gave His life for us and Christ reigns in us.

May we leave here tonight reminded of these Truths, and encouraged by them. Let us not be

like the disciples who could only frame the world within their limited imaginations shaped by their old life. We, the lovers and followers of Christ, are new creations, and there is no limitation to what God can do in us or for us. Let us expect great things from our King. Though His Kingdom is not of this world, yet by God's grace we participate in building it here.

Now let us prepare to come to the Table of the Lord, come and be strengthened to continue our work for the Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns over us even now from His Heavenly throne.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, AMEN.