

Ascension Day Reflection

Thursday 21st May 2020



Acts 1.4-11

Daniel 7.9-14

Luke 24.44-end

Acts 1:12,13a,14

While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, **why do you stand looking up towards 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.' Acts 1:10-11



Accessed 20 May 2020 at <http://francismary.org/jesus-ascended-into-heaven-where-he-is-seated-at-the-right-hand-of-god-the-father-2/>.

Why do you stand looking up to Heaven? This is the question posed to Jesus's disciples by two angels who appear as Jesus, God the Son ascends to God the Father in heaven, in order that God the Holy Spirit can descend 10 days later at Pentecost. I once heard it said that when you read scripture, always look out for the questions. These are a good place to start unpicking what's going on in the bible passage you are reading. *Why do you stand looking up to Heaven?*



4

Eye's focused upwards on Jesus's feet, still bearing the marks of the crucifixion, disappearing before their eyes, the disciples are not focused on what is going on around them on the ground, their eyes are fixed on *what* they have known, *who* they have known, *and loved* disappearing before their eyes, when they had only just had him back from death 40 days previously. Perhaps at the moment, we can all too well relate to the disciples fixed gaze, maybe we have been transfixed on what we have lost during this season of separation and loss, especially whilst we haven't been able to gather together physically as a church body.

² Accessed 20 May 2020 at <https://fsspx.uk/en/news-events/news/ascension-our-lord-jesus-christ-15564>.

³ Accessed 20 May 2020 at <https://www.dolr.org/events/solemnity-ascension-lord-observed-1>.

⁴ Accessed 20 May 2020. Screenshot of image at <https://enduringword.com/creed-up-to-heaven/>.



5

Why do you stand looking up to Heaven? I love this image of the angels almost wagging their fingers at the disciples, giving them a telling off for staring off into the clouds. There is still work to be done...



6

Our gospel, our good news reading from Luke tell us that as Jesus was carried up into heaven, he was blessing his disciples. But the thing about blessing, is that it is meant to be shared and passed on. This is the whole theme of Genesis. God blesses Abraham *in order* that all nations will be blessed through him. This was the commission of the Israelite people recorded in the Old Testament, to be a beacon of light pointing the nations around them to God.

⁵ Accessed 20 May 2020 at <https://anglicanway.org/2017/05/30/ascension/>.

⁶ Mafa Ascension, accessed 20 May 2020 at <https://www.troonold.org.uk/mafa-ascension/>.



7

The rainbow has become such a prominent symbol during this coronavirus pandemic in the UK. The rainbow speaks of God's covenant and commitment to humanity, to never give up on those He has created. What I find really interesting in this image is that the rainbow is the wrong way up. It is angled downwards instead of arching upwards. *Why do you stand looking up to Heaven?*

The disciples must take this blessing that they have received from Jesus and share it with the rest of the world. Proclaiming Jesus's words as he ascended to the Ancient of Days, his Father, our Father: 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'

⁷ Accessed 20 May 2020 at <http://scriptoriumdaily.com/the-ascension-christ-among-us-christ-above-us/>.



8

Why do you stand looking up to Heaven? There is work to be done. The disciples must transfer their gaze from heaven, down and outwards to the world around them. They have a gospel, good news to proclaim. They have been blessed by Jesus, and Jesus commissions them to go and tell the whole world about him. And their commission has become our commission. Their blessing, our blessing. As we wait in the next 9 days with those first disciples to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, let us pray for those friends and family members who do not yet know Jesus, to come to put their faith and trust in him. And let us seek opportunities both in word and deed to take that blessing of Jesus we have received and to share it with those we speak to or meet, either virtually or from a physical distance.

Why do you stand looking up to Heaven? The angels re-assure the disciples, re-assure us, that they, we, don't need to be staring up at the sky. Jesus will come back again, that's what advent is all about, but there will be no missing it, so they, we, don't need to have eyes fixed 24/7 on the clouds. Instead, there is work to be done, here on the ground. There is the good news of Jesus Christ and the blessing received to be shared with family, friends, communities, countries, until the whole world has heard about Jesus and the abundant life he offers and freely gives.

Why do you stand looking up to Heaven?

⁸ Medieval Great Hospital in Norwich, accessed 20 May 2020 at <https://dailytheology.org/2014/05/29/the-ascension-jesus-feet-our-feet/>.