

Christ ascended

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

If I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also. – Jn.14,3

Collect:

Almighty God, you have raised your only Son to the right hand of your glory, and bestowed on him the name above all names. Assure us that as he reigns with you in heaven so he abides with us on earth to the end of time; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and is glorified with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Here from the world we turn (MP228)

- 1 Here from the world we turn, Jesus to seek;
here may His loving voice graciously speak!
Jesus, our dearest friend, while at Thy feet we bend,
oh, let Thy smile descend! 'tis Thee we seek.
- 2 Come, Holy Comforter, Presence divine,
now in our longing hearts graciously shine!
O for Thy mighty power! O for a blessed shower,
filling this hallowed hour with joy divine.
- 3 Saviour, Thy work revive! Here may we see
those who are dead in sin quickened by Thee!
Come to our hearts' delight, make every burden light,
cheer Thou our waiting sight; we long for Thee.

Words by Fanny J Crosby

Sermon on **Acts 1,1-11 / Eph.1,15-23**

Dear friends

On the morning of the day of Jesus' resurrection Jesus said to Mary Magdalene who was the first witness and had wanted to embrace the risen Lord when she saw him: *"Do not hold on to me, for I*

have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them: 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (Jn.20-17)

With the words "not yet ascended to the Father" he signalled to Mary that the way in which she was seeking to reconnect was falling short of the kind of re-connection that his resurrection meant. Only as the ascended Lord who would thereby enable the coming of the Holy Spirit would he be to Mary and for Mary – and that is believers everywhere and in every time - what he wanted her to have and know: namely, the presence with her of the saving, sin and death conquering Lord, the knowledge of and union with the Father, in him the re-connection of heaven and earth.

40 days after his resurrection his ascension then took place in the presence of his disciples whom he had gathered: "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight." (Acts 1,9) And what he had said to them before that was this: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (1,8)

When Jesus faded from their view, he did not equally fade from their lives. On the contrary, by ascending into heaven he connected their lives through his person with God and God with them – "my Father and your Father, my God and your God". Now, because he would send the Holy Spirit, their knowing and loving him would in a far deeper and fuller sense become a knowing of God. This he had taught them when he was with them: "If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." (Jn.14,15-20) In other words, Jesus *in his person*, having done what he did (i.e. dying for the sins of the world, bearing the judgment that sin deserves in obedience to the will of God), is heaven and earth re-connected. That is what his ascension signifies and what the coming of the Holy Spirit applies and puts in place. And if we ask where this re-connectedness of heaven and earth is manifest, the answer is: it is manifest, in seed-form and following the pattern of the cross, in the disciples and the church which is created by their witness of Christ.

That heaven and earth are re-connected *in his person* through his death and resurrection means it is accessible to faith. This means that the way a person is connected with God is by faith in Jesus Christ. This, again, is to say that heaven and earth connect in the believer and that the way that this connection, this state of connectedness, must become manifest is through the believing community because of what it is – *the fullness of him who fills everything in every way* (Eph.1,23).

But now I hear a voice say, and perhaps you do too: "Well, sounds as if faith is all we are left with. If so, we are not really left with much!" But this is a voice that belongs to someone who does not see that faith is knowledge, is about knowing what God has done and is saying, that it is knowledge of God by God.

This is what is behind Paul's prayer and is the reason *why* he prays: "I keep praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know." This prayer is said for those who believe, because their faith is about the reality of Jesus

Christ, the reality that is created anew in him, and because it connects them to this reality. The prayer is there because their faith is totally reliant on God making this reality known to them. It is by this knowledge that faith comes to be, is made real and grows.

Let us be reminded by Paul's prayer for the church what the reality is that faith has access to: Reality is that through faith in Jesus we have and own the hope that we shall be where he is ("our lives are hidden with Christ in God" – Col.3,3!), shall be remade in his image and share in the glory he has with the Father. Reality is that Jesus will come again and at his second appearance "*shall bring salvation to those who are waiting for him*" (Hebr.9,28). Reality is that God will raise from the dead all who believe by the same power by which He "*raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realm*". Reality, too, is that all that Christ is and has, his power and authority, he uses to benefit the church, which he does through the Spirit who guides the church into all the truth that he taught (Jn.16), because he identifies with those who belong to him so completely they are his body – to be heaven and earth reconnected in full as he fills it with gifts and blessings.

Dear friends, we have a Lord who, having come from God and being God, has dwelt among us, has died for our sins, has been raised from the dead and has ascended to the right hand of God. Let us be before God humbly acknowledging our sins and pray that our faith may be informed by the truth of Jesus Christ through the Spirit. Because the faith that is informed by the truth that in Jesus Christ sinner and God are reconciled, heaven and earth reconnected, will abide in the truth. AMEN

Lord God, in Jesus Christ you have reconciled the world to yourself. You sent the Apostles to tell us and call us to faith so that we should be reconciled and should live and die as such, knowing that our lives are now hidden with Christ in you. His ascension to your right hand means we know where we belong and where we are going. Forgive us, for Jesus' sake, our sins which convict us of unbelief and strengthen us in all goodness. Fill us with your Spirit that we may be guided into all the truth you revealed in Jesus Christ and may show it with our lives, to your praise and glory. Amen

- time of prayer / intercession – [we give thanks for God's mercy and faithfulness, for the compassion and steadfast love he has for all that he has made, that all his judgments are just and righteous, that he is our refuge and the helper of all who call to him; we pray for those who have become ill, are fighting illness or are recovering from it, for those who care for the needs of others; for those in positions of leadership and authority: that they may rule wisely and seek peace, that they may guard the values by which a society can flourish, that they may lead with courage and wisdom, for a turning to the light that is God's Word; for those who have lost loved ones, need comfort into their grieving and the loving presence of friends; we give thanks for all the help we have received and still experience, for grace and answered prayers; we pray for the despondent and the hopeless, for those who seek light, for the wisdom to comfort the suffering; we pray for our sister church in Northern India and for the body of Christ worldwide and here, for our

church, the General Assembly, the church's leadership; we think of the situation in India, Nepal and other places, the suffering of the people there and elsewhere, the attempt of the authorities to regain control; we give thanks for the help that is being delivered; we pray for the situation in Israel, the rift between the Palestinians and the Jews; for perseverance in the determination to share our means with those who lack them; we pray for God's blessing on the preaching and teaching of His word, for people to respond in repentance and faith, for freedom and liberty and courage to stand for what is good and true and honours His name;]

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

Keep hold of what is good and avoid all forms of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy through and through, and keep you sound in spirit, soul, and body, free of any fault when our Lord Jesus Christ comes.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN