

## Ascension, and This Week's News

- [Ephesians 1:15-23](#)
- [Luke 24:44-53](#)

I know some of you read the New York Times and you will have seen David Brooks' excellent piece on the recent revelation of sexual abuse in the Southern Baptist church. He concludes with this paragraph:

We're living in a period awash in cruelty — not only with abuse scandals, but also with mass shootings, political barbarism and the atrocities in Ukraine. How much will the pummeling act of experiencing the news these days lead to empathy erosion? Where will the forces of re-humanization come from?

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This is something we have discussed before – how do we handle the news? This week has been especially painful with the deaths of small children and their teachers in Uvalde and the knowledge of police inaction at a time when lives could have been saved. And that came hard on the heels of the shooting of Black shoppers in Buffalo. All against the ongoing drone of the war in Ukraine, the possibility of a world food shortage and severe drought and famine in East Africa.

It is difficult to hear and see even for the length of a single news program. Some of us just turn it off, while others can't stop watching. Brooks' is certainly right to talk of 'the pummeling act of experiencing the news'. Yet he doesn't stop there, he asks 'Where will the forces of re-humanization come from?'

This my friends, is our mission. For to reconcile humanity with God is to make us fully human.

Today we are remembering the ascension – the day when Jesus left this planet in his human form. The day that he stopped being bound by time and space and became fully the Cosmic Christ.

We know that he did not literally ascend to heaven – we have been to the moon and beyond and there is no sign of heaven. Rather he passed into another dimension – and scientists assure us that there are plenty of those – another dimension where the picture of reality is rather different.

A reality which is expressed in the reading from Ephesians:

“the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

Even as we are pummeled by the experience of the news, this is also reality – in a different dimension Christ is above all human rule and authority and fills all in all. The Cosmic Christ fills all of the universe. The Cosmic Christ who we know as the innocent victim, the peace-bringer and love-maker. Theirs is the quality which truly fills the universe – non-violence, peace and love.

And this is where we re-find our humanity, as we live these values in our lives and vote them in our elections and hold our elected officials accountable.

At vespers this week, Sarah-Meg was talking about the importance of living the reign of God. The importance of living as if Christ really is all in all. We are all familiar with the trope “be the change you want to see” – as we live the reign of God we are making that real – we are saying

there is more to life than cruelty. As we pray for those who are affected by cruel, inhumane acts and as we pray for those who perpetrate them, we are changing the world – we are proclaiming the Christ – we are helping to manifest the non-violence, peace and love which are just as real as the cruelty. In fact, more real because they are eternal whereas human inhumanity will eventually be overcome.

The temptation is to think that Jesus rose above it all, and so can and should we. The temptation is to think that Jesus ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of God watching everything happening here from a distance, and that as his followers we can do the same -we can avoid unpleasantness by rising above it all and focusing on heavenly things. We imagine Jesus ascending into the clouds getting away from it all, away from all the unpleasantness of this world to live in luxury on heaven. And then we imagine being there with him in the future.

That is a temptation because it separates us from this world that we live in and it leads us to avoid confronting the forces of evil. I am sure that the gentlemen of the Southern Baptist Church believed on some level that they were doing the right thing when they suppressed or at best ignored women and children complaining about abuse. As Brooks writes, “Those leaders’ stated beliefs and sacred creeds had zero effect on their actual behavior, just as similar creeds and beliefs had zero effect on the Catholic bishops who behaved in much the same way when they learned of abuses years ago.”

People of God, our creeds and beliefs must have an effect on our behavior or they are worth nothing.

And that as you know, was one of Jesus’ pet peeves. Religious people who said the right things but did nothing to put their beliefs into practice.

Yes Jesus “ascended” but he didn’t leave this planet or this universe. He left his mark on the world in the form of the disciples who would

become the church – and he promised the Holy Spirit would lead them and guide them. The Holy Spirit is ready to do just that, the Holy Spirit is ready to lead and guide us into the future. The Holy Spirit is ready to empower us to be the church that God intends – Christ’s Body – the body of the one who fills all in all.

So how are you going to live out your beliefs this week? How are you going to share the love of Christ and the values of the reign of God? We are the Body of Christ, what we pray, what we do and how we do it makes a difference.

We are called to be the forces of re-humanization, standing against violence of any kind, working to change gun laws which fail to protect innocent children and citizens just going about their daily lives, working to create a safe and just society where no-one is victimized and all are healed. The Cosmic Christ is working through us. The Cosmic Christ is here and now, in this building, in this moment, in this church.

It is our calling to make the Christ manifest in this world, not just in the world to come. And therein lies healing. Let us pray.

May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know him, so that, with the eyes of our hearts enlightened, we may know what is the hope to which he has called us, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. Amen