

**Sermon May 24<sup>th</sup> 2009** (Colossians 1:1-15) “Christ Jesus the Lord”

*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him,*

This is Ascension Sunday.

That’s maybe not a day of the Church calendar we particularly mark:  
Christmas we know; Palm Sunday; Good Friday; Easter; Pentecost.

But, do we ever think about Ascension?

Yet the Apostles’ Creed states:

“[Jesus] ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”

Now, lots of things about Jesus don’t make it into the creed.

There are no disciples mentioned, no miracles, not even any of his teaching.

Yet the Ascension is there.

So why was the Ascension so important to the apostles?

Well the reason is because it was for them such amazing news.

The Jesus they’d come to know,

The man from Galilee who’d been their teacher and friend,

Their Rabbi – who’d called them, and believed in them, travelled with them and forgiven them,

Not only had he risen from the dead,

But he was now seated at the Father’s Right Hand Side.

He was now declared to be the eternal son of God

Ruling over the universe.

As they looked to heaven, they knew that heaven had a friendly face.

And so, as they prayed, they had no doubt that God would hear them,

Because the same Jesus who’d been their friend was echoing their prayers in his  
Father’s presence.

There was no greater guarantee that God was with them.

No greater guarantee that they were assured of the Father’s love and acceptance and  
that they were his.

But it wasn’t just a spiritual act that told them they were OK when they looked to  
heaven.

It said something too about the earth, about the universe, about life now.

You see, knowing that Jesus was glorified and ruling over all, changed the way they  
looked at reality.

There were twelve of them, plus a few more,

and against them were all the powers that had crucified Jesus:

the might of Rome

the rejection of God’s own people

and a completely pagan gentile world.

It didn’t seem fair odds.

But yet,

the ascension said that Jesus was reigning over all creation.

Every aspect of the universe was a Jesus aspect.

Every question had a Jesus answer.

That little band of believers could face down Caesar and all his legions of evil  
because the man they knew and had trusted now ruled over all.

The infant church knew that the universe was Jesus-shaped:

every aspect was his  
no other power mattered  
no other truth counted  
no other consideration had any relevance  
because Jesus sat at the right hand of the God the Father.

It is all summed up in the Colossian hymn that we've been looking at.  
(Read Col 1:15-20)

People say today

"How can you say 'Jesus is Lord of all' when the world is full of billions who believe other things and hold other truths?"

I want to reply: "Well, the disciples said the same thing and there were only twelve of them. And they had no idea – just what God was about to do – as his church sprang into life."

Ascension says that the universe is Christ's:  
given by his Father as his reward for the cross  
and he reigns over every part of it – and every aspect of it.

There is no part of reality that is godforsaken  
because Jesus fills the totality of reality.  
There is not secular world outside of his Kingdom  
for Christ abolishes the secular separation.  
There is no neutral reasoning  
for Christ is victorious over all reasoning.  
There is no appeal to neutral ground  
because Christ claims all ground as his.  
There is no independent self-evident truth  
because Christ is all the truth in existence.

It is an amazing, huge, gigantic, enormous, unspeakable, Christ that we worship  
and yet, we know his love – for we see it in the gospel message of the man from Galilee.

And that, that was what Paul was trying to get across to the Colossians.

"Look at the size of our Jesus"

You recall?

They'd come to know Jesus as their saviour.

They'd accepted that he'd died for them.

But they hadn't understood that he wanted to fill the entire reality of their lives.

And they had questions:

How shall we live?

How shall we worship?

How we make decisions?

How do we know what's right and wrong?

And because they hadn't grasped that Jesus was the answer to all these things, they had opened their minds and their lives to other stuff that had little or nothing to do with Jesus.

Epaphrus had evangelised them – he'd taught them the basics of the gospel – but they'd never really got to grips with how to move on from that starting point and apply this same gospel of Jesus Christ to all of life.

Their Jesus had been too small.

And so, they were wide open to false teachers who'd filled their minds with other stuff: rules and principles, truths and logic, human reasoning, that had nothing to do with the Jesus they'd believed in, and was not at all based on his word and his rule.

And so in 2:8

Paul says no.

No to Godless philosophies.

No to human reasoning.

No to people who appeal to "elemental spirits of the universe",

"rules of nature" or who speak of way of working out how to live that have nothing to do with Jesus.

And so, it is a no.

No to other values, other priorities or other reasoning – no matter how well sounding, no matter whether they come from a self-help book, daytime tv, a lodge, a political party, a newspaper, or society at large.

Why?

Because the Christ we have believed in, fills all reality, and is the only master guide or guru that we need.

2v9 "For in him, the who fullness of deity dwells bodily  
and

2v10 "and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority"

The fullness of life is in Jesus Christ, and that is the basis for everything.

And the key verses here are the two before that.

2v6-7

"As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as your were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."

It's not just that once upon a time you received Christ and became Christians.

It's not just that once you believed and trusted.

That's just the start.

But you received Christ Jesus, the Lord

the master

the ruler

you received a teaching about Jesus that invited you to put your lives under new management.

And that is the starting point of a whole life – in which we are called to work out what this teaching of "Christ Jesus the Lord" means in every aspect of our living.

To grow, to be built up, to root deeper,

with this faith in Christ Jesus the Lord, that we have been taught.

We are to recognise the right of Christ to rule and determine the character of all our living.

Every question we come to, every dilemma we face, every opinion we form, every decision we make, we come recognising that the writ of Christ runs here.

So, it is not just that we believed in Christ

but as we go through life

we grow working out what Jesus is Lord means here.

That's what Paul is saying to the Colossians  
all the questions you have about what to do next  
about right and wrong  
about priorities  
about worship  
about living life  
about raising families  
about husband and wives  
about kids and parents  
about slaves and masters  
all of them have to be worked out solely and totally from the basic starting point of  
Jesus Christ the Lord.

This is advanced discipleship – but it is to be consistent with the faith you've been  
taught from the beginning.

On Tuesday night, about 70 of you gathered here for a meeting on the Church's  
attitude to homosexuality, in response to debates at the General Assembly.

Can I begin by thanking you for doing that?

I was absolutely delighted at the number that came, and in the manner in which we  
listened and discussed.

We may not all have agreed.

But, just by taking the effort to come together and to learn together, we made some  
incredibly important statements.

We said, we are the people of Jesus Christ the Lord:

and when we face questions

and when we need to work out truth

we will be the people of Jesus Christ the Lord.

We will seek his guidance.

We will read his Word

We will listen to his people – all of them

and we will pray in his name.

We will pay attention to what the Word of God has to say.

We will not have our minds shaped by following social conventions

by going with the flow

by relying on prejudices,

or, heaven help us, by reading the reverend columnists of the Glasgow Herald.

Because Christ Jesus has to be Lord here as everywhere else.

And if we talk of nature, or what's natural – we will do so remembering that Christ is  
the Lord of nature.

We will not look for the self-evident truths of society, but we will remember that  
Jesus is the way the truth and the life, and that sometimes that truth is uncomfortable  
and unpalatable.

And that he's given us his written Word, and he's given us each other to lead us to  
truth.

And whatever we end up saying on this issue.

We will proclaim that the writ of Jesus Christ the Lord runs here.

He is lord of my sexuality – as he is Lord of all of my being  
and he is certainly Lord of the Church.

(I've seen people saying this week, church seems obsessed with sex – I've seen other people say we never talk about it and hush it up. We really can't win. But the fact is, we are sexual beings. And if Christ is to be Lord of all of our life – he has to be lord here too.

And certainly Lord, as the Church works out what to do.)

The Church of Scotland has fought long, painful, and sometimes bloody battles to insist that Christ alone must be Lord of the Church – and no external reasoning.

In 1637, Jenny Geddes threw her stool at the Dean of Edinburgh – when an Anglican Prayer book was introduced to the Church of Scotland. (It was too Catholic for her tastes)

It wasn't really about the prayer book.

It was a protest that King Charles would not be allowed to impose his thinking on the Church.

Christ was King in the Church.

And thousands, at the cost of their lives, signed the National Covenants, a massive petition protesting that Christ alone is King of the Church.

And no external considerations, power, influence, lobby groups, or threats would control her.

Then, in 1843, 450 ministers gave up their manses and stipends and walked out of the General Assembly – followed by hundreds of thousands of Scots.

Why? What was the issue?

Well, it was not quite as Ron Fergusson suggests, simply about the sovereign right of a congregation to choose its own minister – these were Presbyterians and not congregationalists.

Rather, the Church had abolished the right of rich landowners to choose the ministers. But the landowners had persuaded the courts to overrule the church.

And so the principle of the walk-out was that civil courts should not govern Christ's Church.

The Church must do as Christ commanded it, and not be pushed about by considerations of law and legal rights, or social pressure.

Why?

Because Christ alone was ruler over the Church.

Whatever the Church does about homosexuality, (and it is not yet clear what it is going to do), or whatever we say on any other issue that modern life throws at us, and there are many, the Church cannot and must not make decisions because society thinks this or that, or because of European law suggests, or because a liberal media may give us a hard time, and try to paint it as out of step, or because of any other outside pressure.

Christ Jesus the Lord must be the only head and authority

the only guide and standard

the only consideration as truth is sought,

because Jesus is reigning as Lord over all else

ascended and at the Father's right hand side.

And his Kingdom is inclusive – reaching out to all those everywhere, who will have him as Lord and obey his call and accept his call to be disciples.

And his nature is love – a love that calls people everywhere to repent and be forgiven, and to follow on the tough way of discipleship, living as Christ Jesus the Lord asks them to live.

And at times, this will not sit well with the easy tolerance of our modern society.  
It will not fit in with the modern demand that I will live my life, as I please and that  
no one will tell me what to do.

And at times, it is difficult.

And it is so tempting to pick up the logic and consensus of the world  
with its rules, and its philosophy.

Just as it was tempting for the Colossians.

But we are the people of Christ Jesus the Lord.

And we live our lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith,  
just as your were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

It doesn't always make for easy discipleship

It won't always give us certain answers to the questions we have

It will sometimes leave room for doubt, and yes for disagreement.

Jesus knew all of that, even at the start.

And the Church has never been any other way.

But here, this Ascension Sunday,  
we come with thanksgiving  
that the Lordship of Christ Jesus  
is not just a call to live in obedience  
but it is a fact to celebrate.

Jesus is ruler over all things.

The fullness of God is in him

and we are full of him.

The Jesus we know – and who knows us

The Jesus we love and who loves us

is reigning over all things.

“As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted  
and built up in him and established in the faith, just as your were taught, abounding in  
thanksgiving.”

Lord reign in us

Lord reign in our Church

Lord reign over the world today.

Amen