

## “Honoring Our Humanity.”

**T**his past Thursday was the feast day of the Ascension. If you are thinking, “Oh, really, it was?” don’t worry. Most of Christendom missed it. The Ascension is not one of the more popular feast days on the church calendar, but, like Ron Burgundy, it’s kind of a big deal. So, I propose to take a few minutes to talk about it, and, perhaps, we might grow to appreciate it.

If I had held a worship service that day, we would have heard the Gospel of Luke’s version of the resurrected Jesus taking his final leave from his disciples. As it is, this morning, we’ve heard the author Luke’s version of the Ascension as he recorded it in the Acts of the Apostles.

The first thing we need to be clear about, is that the Ascension is about God. It’s *not* about gravity, or the physical location of heaven, or anything like that. It’s about God. In fact, even though Ascension Day comes near the end of the Season of Easter, it actually has more to do with Christmas. Really.

At Christmas we celebrate the Incarnation, God becoming flesh. God living among us. The divine becoming human.

And at the Ascension, this particular human being — the person *and* the resurrected body of Jesus — became for all eternity a part of who God is. The life of a single, individual human being is forever joined to the life of God.

It’s important to remember that it was not the spirit of Jesus, or the essence of Jesus, or the divine nature of Jesus, or the invisible part of Jesus, or the idea of Jesus, or anything like that, that ascended to the Father. It was the resurrected body of Jesus: a body that the disciples had touched, a body that ate and drank with them, a real, physical, but gloriously restored body-bearing the marks of nails and a spear. This is what ascended. This is what, now and forever, is a living, participating part of God.

In some way, it would be fair to say that the Ascension changed who God is.

It's important to really think about the Ascension, and to think about what it says about being human.

Because, sometimes, it's easy for Christians to become uncertain about the value of our humanity. In some circles, we've garnered a reputation for being uncomfortable, or even embarrassed, about much that characterizes our humanity.

I'm talking about things like: the reality of our bodies and our appetites; the fact that we are finite, and limited; the fact of our mortality and the certainty of our death; the painful difficulty we have in relationships; the struggles, joys, and setbacks that always seem to be a part of our quest for God; and the power that our feelings and emotions have over us.

All of these aspects of being human, and so many others, we frequently treat as less than holy, as somehow divorced from our spiritual and religious lives, even as bad things we should not have.

The Ascension, along with the Incarnation, is here to tell us that it is a *good* thing to be a human being; indeed it is a wonderful and an important and a holy thing to be a human being. It is such an important thing that God did it. Even more, the fullness of God now includes what it means to be a human being. The experience, the reality, and the stuff of being a person is so valuable that God has made it a part of God's life.

Here's an illustration to help us understand what I'm saying.

Imagine that a core tenet of our faith was that *fish* had been created in the image and likeness of God. And that, some two thousand years ago, God had become incarnate in one particular fish — a fish swimming in the waters of northern Palestine, who happened to be handy with hammers and saws and lumber.

How would that affect our attitude toward fish? Well, we might consider all fish special, and rather holy. We might not go fishing. Places like *Long John Silver* or *The Jumpin' Catfish* might be in trouble. And we would likely approach all fish with a special sort of awe and reverence. (In fact, you might want to take a moment to read the fish story, that I've posted on the bulletin board in the Narthex, on your way out this morning.)

Well, obviously, God did *not* become a fish. Sure, he created fish, but he did not become a fish. But, of every living creature under the sun, only one is now eternally a part of who God is.

Given our response to the whole fish scenario, imagine how we might treat that particular creature (in which God had become incarnate) if it were a fish; and remember that it is a human being.

This is not to say that everything about us as people is wonderful and holy. Nor is it to say that everything we human beings do is wonderful and holy. But it is very clear that, in the eyes of God, it is a wonderful and a holy thing to be a human being. This is one reason we should treat ourselves, and one another, with care and with great respect.

The Ascension, the fact that God has brought into himself one who is fully human, should remind us that simply being a human being is a sacred thing; a thing never to be abused, or taken lightly.

For another thing, the Ascension means is that God knows what it is like to be like you or me, and know in a way that is very different than knowing what it's like to be a fish, (or to be anything else.) God knows what it is like to be a human being because God remembers what it is like to be a person.

God remembers what it's like to hurt and to laugh, to pray and to hunger, to be lost and afraid, to celebrate and to mourn. God remembers what it's like to live, and what it's like to die. God knows this, and God knows this in the only way that really matters as far as relationships are concerned. God knows because God has been there.

So, the feast day of the Ascension reminds us that we are able to approach God, to reach out to God, and to look for the presence and will of God, with confidence and with joy. For as we turn toward God, we are not only dealing with the creator of the universe and the ruler of all time and of eternity; we are also drawing near to the one who lived our life and who has shared our fate. We are coming near to one who knows us and who cares. We are, in other words, coming home.