

Sermon  
Ascension Sunday  
May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023  
The Reverend Victoria Scott  
Church of the Ascension

Readings: [ACTS 1:1-11](#); [PSALM 47 OR PSALM 93](#); [EPHESIANS 1:15-23](#); [LUKE 24:44-53](#)

As I look at the teenager he is now, it seems like a long time ago, but when my son Evan was just about the age that Andrew, our baptismal candidate is, “Carry me, Mummy” was a constant refrain. Evan wasn’t keen on being pushed in a stroller, and if we were going any distance we would have been days making the journey if we had walked at his pace. So, very often, I carried him on my shoulders. We covered many kilometers that way, and we’d talk all along the way. With his head close to mine we’d see lots of the same things at the same time. He’d asked questions; I’d point things out...

I’ve mentioned to you before that Sam Wells that we should not be called “human beings”, but rather “human becomings”. He reminds us that:

“...every plant, every person, every continent, every planet, every star is changing all the time. Every time you or I do something, we change. Our history changes and our experience changes, and we become a person whose identity is subtly altered. We are changing every second of every day.”

For the whole of this earthly life, we are in a state of “becoming”. That time with Evan often on my shoulders was a wonderful phase in his “human becoming”, and in mine. To be able to carry him, to hold him, in his wonder and discovery – in his becoming – was a blessing that I’ll treasure always.

Ascension Day – the feast day for which we are named here at Ascension – was this past Thursday: exactly 40 days after Easter Sunday, and we’re transferring the celebration to today. It was at this time last year that you were in the process of searching for a new Incumbent, and I actually wrote a letter of response to the search committee on Ascension Day last year. The feast of the Ascension has always been full of resonance and meaning for me, and it continues

to feel very Spirit-filled that the process that brought us together happened around that time.

The spirit and energy of the feast of the Ascension is infused in this place, in this community. Rowan Williams says this about Jesus's Ascension:

“Jesus hasn't just gone away. He has gone deeper into the heart of reality – our reality and God's. He has become far more than a visible friend and companion; he has shown himself to be the very centre of our life, the source of our loving energy in the world and the source of our prayerful, trustful waiting on God.”

Anglican priest and poet Malcolm Guite says that Ascension Day is when Jesus both leaves us and is also given to us in a new and more universal way. He is taken into heaven – the heart of all things – and is therefore accessible to all who call on him.

Marcus Borg says that the problem with the Ascension story is that it is told as though it took place in the “time-space” world, leading to a reading of the story as a historical event, and to a struggle to believe this account in literal terms. The point, though, he says, is not in these details. The point is that the flesh and blood Jesus is no longer constrained by the limits of this “time-space” world.

Jesus, when he walked this earth, could only be in one time and place, but now, Jesus is with God. This means that God, for us, is now, never without Jesus. God, for us, is never without the invitation into relationship. Never without the human connection. This means that Jesus, like God, is everywhere. With us, in us, in all things.

Accessibility, loving relationship, connection. God with us, and us with each other and with all of creation. Ascension Day is the day when the disciples became the head, heart and hands of Jesus in the world, and so are we his head, heart and hands in our world today. You can feel that – the commitment to accessibility and connection, to being Jesus's head, heart and hands in the world –

you can feel that in this place, in our worship, and in our ministries. You can feel the commitment to “human becoming” – to movement and change and growth with God and with one another and our world – in this community, and I give thanks for that, every day.

That feeling of wanting to be carried. That feeling of fatigue. The world is a heavy place with its conflict and suffering, and the feelings we have in the midst of that conflict and suffering are heavy: fear, worry, sadness. This is a place where we can come with those feelings. This is a place where we come to be reminded that God is with us, through the human connection of relationship with Jesus, in our “human becoming”. This is what carries us – just as I carried Evan on my shoulders – in our becoming.

Jesus promises the Spirit to the disciples, and he promises that same Spirit to us. In Luke we hear of the disciples “...being clothed with power from on high”. (Luke 24:49) In Acts we hear reference to being baptized with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:5) We are not to be Jesus’s head, heart and hands on our own. The Spirit connects us with God, with Jesus, always, in all things. And in the connection, the Spirit also carries us, lifts us up on her shoulders, as we make our way through life, in all our “human becoming”.

The Spirit lifts us on her shoulders, and Jesus is everywhere, but he needs our hearts beating his message of love in the world. He needs our hands to do the lifting and carrying, our feet to walk a path of justice and peace.

In a few minutes we’re going to baptize Andrew. It is a joy to celebrate this in community, and this sacrament – this outward and visible sign of an inward, invisible grace – is a blessed moment in Andrew’s “human becoming”. It is a moment when we make visible that God is never without the invitation into relationship, never without the human connection. It is a moment when we acknowledge that the Spirit carries us in this life, in our human becoming. In our baptismal vows – which Andrew’s parents will say yes to on his behalf – we acknowledge this relationship and connection, and we commit to being Jesus’s head, heart and hands in the world. Hear that in the sound of the water, feel it as

you are sprinkled with it, taste it as you receive communion or a blessing this morning.

May our time here together this morning be a reminder for each of you that just as God carried Jesus into heaven – into the to the heart of all things – that eternal connection of relationship is carrying you in your “human becoming”. Know that the Spirit is there to carry you on her shoulders when you are tired, when life is heavy. And may that same Spirit fill you with the energy and drive to be Jesus’s head, heart and hands in the world, in his name. Amen.