ASCENSION 10th May 7pm St Mary’s Newick. 2018.

Well done for coming this evening. You are good worthy Christians.

The Ascension is such a not very much festival. You’ve got Christmas and Good Friday and Easter Day – they’re all easy because – there are certain foods associated with them! And because they are so wound up in the story of our Salvation.

So of course they’re important. And Pentecost – where would we be without the Spirit? But who needs the Ascension?

We started Lent in Barcombe with Ash Wednesday – the story of Jesus in the wilderness – and yes you can see that that’s important for us Christians to think about our sin and temptation. And then we moved to Chailey for Maundy Thursday – and that’s obviously important because that’s all tied into the prophecies and the death of Jesus.

But who needs the Ascension.

Actually the **Ascension is more important** than any of these other festivals. The Ascension is simply the most important moment in the Christian calendar. It is the **crown** of it all.

We are now living in a **new time zone**, a new period. It is not the time of life before the Incarnation – BC – Before Christ – nor is it the time of **Jesus on earth**, but it is the time of **Jesus in heaven**, our King. And that says so much – about how we view our **bodies**, how we view **ourselves**, **each other**, how we **pray**, and how we **live**. Without the Ascension we would be sorry little people indeed.

In the Ascension we see the **body of Jesus ascend** into heaven.

**Luke** has Jesus **blessing** the disciples and then leaving them, taken up into heaven – whilst **Acts** has Jesus being **hidden** from them by a **cloud** and the disciples looking up into the sky as Jesus was going.

In the same way that we have a **physical resurrection**, so too we have a **physical ascension**. And that’s important And here’s why.

Here’s about FIVE different reasons why and I don’t mind which ones you latch on to, they’re not especially in a particular order.

1. **Bodies matter**. Your body matters, my body matters. This was a really big deal in **ancient** days – there was this idea that you are a spirit but you’re trapped inside a tomb of flesh – ‘soma sema’ – the **body a tomb**. The reason, they said, why there was **pain** and suffering was because we’re trapped inside this body.

When Jesus ascends, it is not simply his **liberated divine spirit** that ascends – at last the Son of God going back to where he was before. No. **Jesus – the God-man** – ascends to heaven body and all.

Some groups said well if we are **just spirit** and our bodies don’t matter then it doesn’t matter what we do to them with them – so that was an **excuse** for some sin –

But Christians have held tightly to this idea that **you are more than just a spirit**, a soul, you are body and soul.

2. So Jesus the complete Jesus **all of him is ascended** into heaven. And we are told that Jesus will be our **Judge**. That’s a **good** thing. Some years back we had a **court case** in Barcombe Church, when the Judge stood up and initiated the meeting with a **prayer** I thought – yes! No matter what happens, this day is in God’s hands and God is good – so no matter how it works out – We are held in God’s hands.
So to see Jesus as your judge – that’s a good thing. There’s plenty of people I would not care to have judge me. But Jesus. Okay. But look and see that the judge we have is a bodily ascended human Jesus – one who has known suffering and who knows our suffering. Jesus is Judge. Our Bodies matter.

3. Do you enjoy the Holy Spirit? Have you seen the Spirit of God inside of you, at work in this Church? Well you know perfectly well that Jesus promised that he would go so that he would send another paraclete – another comforter – another one who would draw alongside us. So if you want proof that the Ascension worked – we need only look to see the Holy Spirit. The arrival of the Holy Spirit upon His Church is proof of the Ascension. And that is the 1st of the promises of Jesus. You will have been to too many funerals, I’m sorry, and at some of them you will have heard me preach on Jesus saying: I go, I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back I will take you to be with me, now trust me. The promise of John 14.

Jesus – the full God-man – has ascended to heaven and there he is preparing a place for you in the heavenly mansion. With the body of Jesus in heaven we get to see the first fruits of our immortality. In the ascension we get to see that humanity is immortal in the presence of God. Jesus ascends in order to send the Holy Spirit, in order to (3) prepare a place for you. (2) Jesus is to be our judge, (1) your bodies matter.

4. What is Jesus doing in heaven? – he is praying for you – Hebrews 7.25 – Jesus lives to intercede for us. But more than that – Jesus in heaven is our Great High Priest – it is through Him that we’re able to pray, that we’re able to rush into the heavenly throne room and instead of saying – “Oh Sorry God you look a bit busy”, we’re able to say “Hi Dad – I need help!” Hebrews 10.19.

Jesus is more than our High Priest in heaven. In the book of Revelation we see him Crowned – from Revelation 14v14
I looked and there before me … seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head … Rev 19v12 His eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many crowns. So that’s exciting. Jesus our King is enthroned in heaven. No really it is exciting.

If Jesus is your king then It means that that your citizenship is in heaven. If Jesus has ascended to be our King then that has big implications for how we see each other – as all part of the family – we are brothers and sisters – there are times when we treat each other with some appalling sibling rivalry – I don’t think that’s what the metaphor is encouraging.

With Jesus as our King, we have our mission made clear to us – to pray for God’s kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. To show what that sort of life looks like in the way that we love and serve and help and forgive each other. In the way that we participate in the transformation of this world. We have a gospel to proclaim. With Jesus ascended to heaven, our King, our citizenship, our identity held in heaven, that is where you and I belong.

but in the meantime we are caught up in a mission, in an adventure, to show people the love of God that Jesus has given to us – through the Holy Spirit – poured out on us – because of the Ascension.

The Ascension means – your bodies matter, that Jesus is to be our Judge, that in heaven Jesus is preparing a place for you, is praying for you, and in being our King, joins us together into one family, one church, with one purpose – to show the love and the joy that comes from being called and caught up into in the love of Jesus – our Risen and Ascended King. Amen.