

**Sermon preached by the Rev'd. Cynthia Jackson, Sunday after Ascension, St. Mary's Wimbledon, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2016.**

It is far easier for us to understand earthly glory than it is heavenly glory. There certainly was a lot of earthly glory around last week. You only had to see the front page of the 'Guardian' newspaper on Tuesday with a picture of Richard III and the heading, 'Leicester City Kings of England' to know, even if you weren't a football fan, that something special had happened in Leicester. Leicester City had won the Premier league against all odds! All the team were hailed as heroes.

Jesus Christ was not that sort of hero nor did he seek honour and earthly glory for himself but showed forth the glory of God by his life and example. Last Thursday on the feast of the Ascension and this Sunday the Sunday after Ascension we celebrate the glory of Jesus the Christ, risen and ascended Lord.

St Augustine wrote of the Feast of the Ascension:

*'... This is the festival which confirms the grace of all the festivals together, without which the profitableness of every festival would have perished. For unless the Saviour had ascended into heaven, his Nativity would have come to nothing... and his Passion would have borne no fruit for us, and his most holy Resurrection would have been useless'...\**

All our hymns have a triumphant ring about them including our last hymn:

*"Christ triumphant, ever reigning, Saviour, Master, King.  
Lord of Heaven, our lives sustaining, here us as we sing:  
yours the glory and the Crown, the high renown, the eternal name..."*

Christ is receiving the glory in heaven that he did not receive on earth. His work on earth is complete. The reading from the Book of Revelation gives us the idea of completion:

*"...I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end..."*  
(Rev.22: 13)

Jesus fulfils the promises made in the Old Testament. He is the bright morning star shining in the darkness of the world and illuminating that darkness. No wonder Jesus says of himself ... *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life"...*(John 8: 12)

We receive a challenge at our Baptism when we are told to:  
*"...Shine as lights in the world to the glory of  
God the Father "...*

We cannot keep light to ourselves: we have to share it with others. We have to become missionaries for Christ. We were challenged to do this in our gradual hymn:

*"We have a gospel to proclaim,  
good news for all throughout the earth;  
the gospel of a Saviour's name:  
we sing his glory, tell his worth."*

St Paul gives us this example and what a colourful and dangerous life he led. Our reading from the Acts of the Apostles tells us of Paul and Silas' imprisonment and their miraculous escape during an earthquake. How strange that Paul did not declare his Roman citizenship when he was arrested as he does later on in his ministry? By not doing so God's Glory is revealed.

Paul and Silas' jailer asked the question:  
... *'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'*

I do not think this was so much a theological question as a practical one as to how he could save himself from retribution from the Roman authorities by letting his prisoners escape !

Nevertheless Paul's response is:

*"Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*  
(Acts:16:31).

So the word 'saved' had a double meaning. Firstly the jailer was saved from the Roman authorities. But secondly he was saved and delivered into a new way of living by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and was baptised together with his entire family

In our Gospel reading Jesus prays that his disciples and those who follow on after them and learn of him through their words may be one. This unity is based on love. Through a loving unity God will be glorified.

The message of last week's Gospel and this week is that as Jesus knew God his Father's love and he showed that love to his disciples so they had to pass on that knowledge to the world. By Jesus' love he glorified God. If the apostles had not believed in Jesus they would not have passed his message of love on and we would not be here today.

How hard it is to show forth the love of God in our lives. We look back over the history of the Christian church and we see anything but love as different factions of the church have fought against one another. Thank goodness in this 21<sup>st</sup> century churches of different denominations can work and worship together as the basis of our Christian faith is LOVE. Whatever our denomination we are called to show forth the Love of God to the world by our lives day by day.

So on this Sunday after Ascension let us give thanks for the overwhelming love that God had for the world, shown forth in his Son Jesus Christ. Let us give thanks too that Jesus now reigns with God in glory. May our lives reflect Christ's glory to the world? **Amen.**

\*Quoted by Douglas Galbraith, in his thoughts on the readings for the Ascension, in *The Expository Times*, Vol.127 Number 7, April 2016