

Ascension 2025

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God who is Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

My family lives in three different countries, Switzerland, Uganda and me here in England. It is normal for us to not see each other more than once or twice a year. I try my best to have weekly video calls with my family members around the globe, and we catch up and I play with my niece and nephew over the phone, but it's not always easy. When I spend holidays with family, I really appreciate being able to hug them, play with my niece and nephew and share meals together. Being physically together has become something really special and precious to me and my family. And if we all remember back a couple years, during the pandemic when we had to isolate ourselves from one another, I am sure we all have gained a new appreciation for the ability to share space and life with one another.

In various ways, we all have made experiences of how hard it can be to not be with, to touch and hug a loved one. That is an experience Jesus' disciples went through as well. On Ascension Day the disciples saw their teacher and friend ascend to God the Father. They too could no longer see him or touch him. Jesus was gone, but they were not abandoned. Jesus knew this moment was coming, long

before the disciples could grasp it. He prepared them as much as possible and he interceded for them with the Father, that he would provide them with everything they needed.

Still, wouldn't it have been better, if he had stayed, so we could see him face-to-face, we could touch him, even hug him? William Temple, who was a priest and Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1940s, had some very interesting thoughts on Jesus' ascension. He wrote:

The ascension of Christ is his liberation from all restrictions of time and space. [...] During his earthly ministry he could only be in one place at a time. If he was in Jerusalem, he was not in Capernaum; if he was in Capernaum, he was not in Jerusalem. But now he is united with God, he is present wherever God is present; and that is everywhere.

What William Temple says here, helpfully points out that the Ascension is not the end of Jesus' ministry on Earth. On the contrary, Jesus' ascension transforms and enhances the way Jesus ministers. Because Jesus is not simply abandoning the disciples. He makes them a promise:

And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

Jesus will send them power from on high, the Holy Spirit. The sending of the Spirit is another important event, which is closely linked to the Ascension and we will be celebrating this at Pentecost. Through the Holy Spirit, God, and therefore Jesus, will be made present to the disciples at all times and in all places.

Through the ascension a new and unique way of relationship with Jesus becomes possible. Jesus now transcends time and space. Jesus is present to people all around the world, no longer restricted by time and space, as he was when he walked this Earth.

And I think that transcending of time and space is never more tangible than at the Eucharist, when we encounter Christ in bread and wine. A physical encounter that transcends time and space. A sacrament celebrated and shared all around the world and through the centuries. As we share in this bread and this wine, we encounter him, our healer and redeemer, our teacher and friend, the Son of God and our Saviour.

Amen.