

SERMON NOTES Sunday 12th May 2024

sunnysidechurch

Theme: **Ascension and the coming of God's Kingdom**

Passages: **Acts 1.1-11, Daniel 7.9-14**

Some of the main themes from the sermon

A drama in 5 acts

The history of the world can be seen as a drama in 5 acts in which God restores his creation and mends all things:

Act 1: Creation and Fall

Act 2: The old covenant with Abraham, Moses and the people of Israel

Act 3: The life of Jesus and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God

Act 4 Jesus' death and resurrection

Act 5: The coming of the Holy Spirit and the spread of the Kingdom of God

The story of Jesus ascension is on the very cusp between acts 4 and 5. We are currently living as actors in act 5 of the story of the rescue of God's world.

Discovering theological meanings

Today's bible reading from Acts recounts Jesus' ascension. It is pivotal and important. During his life and after his resurrection Jesus could only be in one place any time (v3). His promise to his disciples was that he would be with them always (Matthew 28.20). This could only happen if Jesus was present in a different way (v5 & v8) in the form of his Spirit.

Like many bible stories this has important echoes that we should not ignore. The disciples would have remembered that the two men in white (v10-11) are like those who greeted the women at the tomb (Luke 24.4) and they deliver a similar message. They may also have thought about the transfiguration (Luke 9.28-36).

Discovering political meanings

When a Roman emperor died it was not unusual for someone to claim to have seen their spirit ascending from their body. This meant that their heir could claim to be a 'son of a god'. Jesus, the real Son of the real God allowed himself to be murdered by the Roman state with the evil connivance of the Jewish state (Herod) and the Jewish Temple. As the disciples witnessed ascension of Jesus (not just his spirit but his whole resurrected self), they would also (like Luke's readers) have thought of the vision of Daniel (Dan7.9-14) and its promise of the ultimate victory of the 'one like a son of man'. The new world order was beginning. The Kingdom of God was about to be unleashed. The phony rulers

who thought they had finished him off had, in fact, done what was needed for Jesus to be glorified as King of kings and Lord of lords. Love wins!

Discovering personal meanings

The Kingdom of God was, from the start, Jesus' project. We see that in v6 to v8. Jesus corrects the disciples misunderstanding and tells them to wait. He will set the timeline for the spread of the Kingdom. And the Kingdom will take a very different form from the one the disciples expected. At Pentecost, 10 days after Jesus' Ascension, the Kingdom of God will explode in a way nobody could have anticipated! It is also unlike any other kingdom. All its subjects are willing volunteers.

The kingdom is here!

We are living as actors in act 5 of God's redemptive drama. The fire that was kindled in Jerusalem at Pentecost is still burning. We are the Kingdom's willing subjects and Jesus is still in charge. How can we play our part in making v8 happen? There are a million answers to that but I want to focus on just one:

Praying the Kingdom

Between Ascension Day and Pentecost the over 1 million Christians from 85 denominations will be each be praying for 5 people they care about to respond 'Yes' to God's call. Let's join in!

Some questions for thought and discussion this week:

1. **Think and talk about the people who nursed or nudged you into saying 'Yes' to God. Do they know the impact they have had on your life? Where are they now? Could you thank them?**
2. **If you have 'Prayed for 5' in previous years, are you aware of anything having changed in the lives of any of them? If so, what have you noticed? If not (and you feel discouraged) please share this with your house group.**
3. **Think of someone on your 'list' for this year. Imagine how they might be different if they said 'Yes' to God. Talk with your house group how they might be.**
4. **Spend a bit of time praying for your 5, sharing names if you feel that's appropriate.**
5. **How else can we play our part as actors in the final act of God's drama of his rescue of his world?**