

Ascension to Pentecost 1



“Jesus... was carried up into heaven” Luke 24.51

A pair of disappearing feet is often all that’s shown of the ascending Jesus by mediaeval artists. At first sight, this has a touch of the ridiculous about it. Our understanding of the universe has changed significantly since this was painted on the walls of Seething Church in South Norfolk. A body being zoomed up into a cloud? A gaggle of friends beneath dangling feet? What are we to make of all this?

The Ascension certainly celebrates the fact that the reign of the crucified and risen one is now no longer limited by time and space: as the historical Jesus becomes the cosmic Christ, loving relationship with him is freely accessible to all. But New Testament writers hardly imagined a literal divine dwelling-place in the sky. It was natural to them though, to draw on ideas and images from the Old Testament as they explained that after a while, Jesus

no longer appeared in material form to his disciples. He ‘ascended’, he left the scene, and is now ‘seated at the right hand of the Father’, meaning that, as Rowan Williams has put it, “when we look at God, we can’t help but see Jesus.”

What do we see as we gaze at this painting in the context of coronavirus?

We notice that the Seething painter has marked each foot with a dark round nail-hole, stressing that the ascending feet are wounded feet. It is the wounded human condition being carried into heaven. Perhaps he had in mind the traumas of his own century – war, plague, civil unrest – as his brush made those holes dark and deep.

We too can gratefully acknowledge that all the distress of our current situation is borne by the ascended Jesus into the divine presence. The global grief brought by Covid 19 is gathered into God.

“The ascension of Christ tilts the universe for us; it gives us a fresh perspective and meaning for the world.”

Richard Bartlett (USPG)

Prayer

**Ascended Christ,
you stand in solidarity
with the weak and wounded
of every time and place:
may we do so too. Amen**