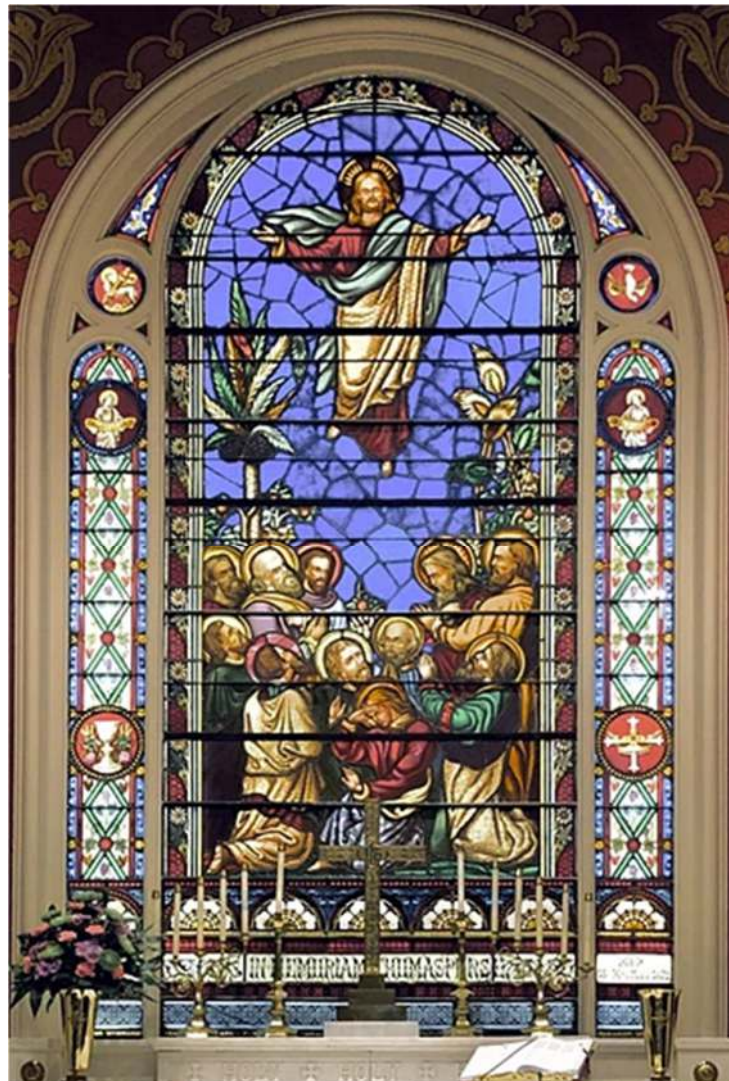


## A Thursday to Remember

By BHW

When I was a boy, nurtured in an evangelical Anglican church, we always had a service of Holy Communion in the evenings of Maundy Thursday and Ascension Day. Observation of Ascension Day seems to have disappeared from most protestant churches today. In the Anglican prayer book, today is the Sunday after Ascension Day, which was last Thursday, the 40th day of the Easter season. The 40 days alludes to Acts 1:3, ‘... *appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.*’ There are several ‘forties’ in the Bible, times of waiting, e.g. the flood (Gen 7:4), Moses on Sinai, Elijah on Horeb (1 Kings 19:8), Jonah in Nineveh (Jonah 3:4), Jesus’ temptations, etc.

A few weeks ago, in the 1 Peter sermon series, we considered Jesus’ earthly journey in four components (1 Peter 3:18,22 [click [to read](#), [to listen](#)]) where Jesus *came, suffered, was made alive, went into heaven*; in other words, the *incarnation*, the *cross*, the *resurrection* and the *ascension*. The ascension is not just an afterthought, to wrap up the story, because the story is in no way ended. Neither Good Friday nor Easter Day marks the conclusion of Christ’s mission. If we were to ask, which of the four demonstrates God’s *glory* the most, we might say, as many do, the resurrection. If I were forced to choose, I note John 12:23, “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*”, so I would suggest the cross, where our Lord Christ exclaimed his cry of anguish (not despair as some say), ‘... *why have you forsaken me ...*’ and his cry of relief, ‘*It is finished!*’ as his suffering ended and His earthly mission was completed. But let’s think again; surely each component of Christ’s sojourn on Earth is as important as the others, and shows us God’s glory. We can’t leave one out. ‘Glory’ is used in the Bible to demonstrate magnificence (of God, or of a king, for example), as perceived by the observer. God’s plan of salvation is indeed magnificent in all its aspects, and the Bible points forwards to the final conclusion of this plan, where Christ has ascended to his throne at God’s right hand. This is encapsulated in Revelation, e.g. 5:12, “*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and*



*wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!"* and 7:10, *"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

Matthew ends his gospel with final words from Jesus before his ascension, 28:18-20, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me ... behold I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Mark ends with 16:19, *"So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God."* John does not describe the ascension but alludes to it in 3:13, [Jesus says] *"No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the son of man"*, 6:62, [Jesus says] *"What if you [the disciples] were to see the Son of Man ascending where he was before?"*, and 20:17, *"... I have not yet ascended to my father..."*, whereas Luke ends his gospel with a brief mention, 24:5, *"... while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven..."* and begins Acts with a detailed account, 1:1-11. Peter also alludes to it in his speech at Pentecost, Acts 2:33-34, *"... being exalted to the right hand of God ..."* quoting Psalm 110, *'... The LORD [Yahweh God] said to my Lord [the Messiah or Christ], "Sit at My right hand..."*. Elsewhere in the NT, Paul, Peter and John clearly know how vital the ascension is in their theology. We might remember, from our Daniel series, that Jesus identified himself, Matthew 24:30, *"... they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."*; and 26:24, *"Jesus said to him [the high priest], 'You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven [i.e. to heaven].'"* with the Son of Man in Daniel's vision of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7. The Bible leaves us in no doubt that Christ demonstrated God's glory at all stages of His journey, and that the work Christ came to do on earth, the work of paying the ransom for our sins, has been fully and finally completed on the cross. But the work of gospel mission, which is also Christ's work, but which he commissioned his disciples to do on his behalf, is yet uncompleted. Christ ascended into heaven, but his followers remain here to proclaim him to the world. Christ is in glory in heaven and shall be again at his coming; but we glorify him on earth by living and preaching the good news of the gospel.

What, then, does Christ do for us now as He sits upon His throne? First, he rules and judges creation with his Father. Secondly, he remains, and shall always be, the author of salvation and holds the book of Life in His hand. Thirdly, He is ready to come, as a King, to close off history and establish His true Kingdom. Fourthly, He has given us the Holy Spirit to empower us to continue his work on earth. Next, while we are His priests in representing God to the world, He is our great High Priest in that, having dealt with sin once for all time in his passion (1 Peter 3:18), yet He intercedes for us when we do sin; Hebrews 4:14,15, *"... we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens ... For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."*; and 1 John 2:1, *"... if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."* And He keeps a place for us right there beside the great I AM.