

## **Ascension Day 2018    Fr. Grant Cohen**

In January 1967, Apollo 1, a 3-man capsule was launched into earth's orbit but something went tragically wrong....

Somewhere in the 31 miles of wiring, one of the wires had been stripped of its insulation and within seconds, flames spread across the cabin and at 6:31 one of the astronauts said, "We've got fire in the cockpit." A few seconds later, the transmission ended with a cry and all three astronauts died.

Two years later, Apollo 11 was made ready for its mission to the moon and President Nixon asked someone to write a speech entitled, "In Event of the Moon Disaster."

If anything went wrong, Nixon would read the speech, the moon would be cut off and the astronauts left alone to die with a minister commending their souls to "the deepest of the deep."

But as we know that's not what happened because on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1969, with less than 30 seconds of fuel left, the lunar module landed in the Sea of Tranquility, and Neil Armstrong stepped off the ladder onto the surface of the moon...the first time a human being had ever gone to another celestial body.

When they returned the astronauts were welcomed with the highest honor for the human race had accomplished its greatest technological achievement of all time.

A great moment in human history but certainly not the greatest...

Those astronauts weren't the first human beings to set foot somewhere other than earth...Jesus was and this was surely the greatest moment in human history.

I wonder what the celebration, the glory, the honor that Jesus received that moment he passed from time into eternity was like, when countless angels, archangels, and people from centuries past gazed upon his glorified human face and celebrated what he had had done.

I wonder if the thief who died beside Jesus was there to welcome him when he arrived....

I can almost imagine Jesus saying to him "I told you it was paradise...."

History has only one main event, our history is of course dotted with important moments... The first fire, the first wheel, the first man on the moon...and no one of us would minimize these things but none of them compare with the cross, the resurrection and the Ascension.

This isn't a particularly well-turned out service for what is essentially a principle feast day....

But we celebrate the Ascension simply because all of heaven celebrates the victorious return of the Lord Jesus, the Lamb who was slain, the Lion who conquered, the one who says "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

An old legend imagines Jesus as he arrives in heaven welcomed by all the angels.

And the angel Gabriel says to him, "You suffered much, dying for the sins of humanity. Does everyone down on earth know it?"

"Just a handful of folks in Jerusalem and Galilee Jesus said."

"Well, Master," continued Gabriel, "what is your plan for everyone to know of your great love for them?"

"Well I asked that group to carry the message into all the world. I told them to tell others, who will in turn tell others until the last person in the farthest corner of the world has heard the story."

"But what if after awhile Peter, James and John forget, and they go back to fishing in Galilee.

Suppose Matthew returns to his tax booth in Capernaum, and all the others lose their zeal and just don't tell anyone anymore. What then?"

After a pause the Lord Jesus, said, "Gabriel, I have no other plan."

Of course, I don't believe that conversation ever happened, but the words are true nevertheless because we are the plan...there is no plan B

We are God's voice here in this place to those people out there, and there isn't anyone else...

If we don't tell them....if we don't reveal what we know, then they won't hear and be a part of the greatest love story that's ever been told.... and one day we may just have to look into those faces as they ask why we didn't tell them.

The truth is, many of us find engaging in mission difficult...and we struggle to talk about our faith in terms of it being a living reality...

We can say that we go to church, but what how does that really make a difference to someone who needs hope.

Imagine if you will a man who works in the Rolls Royce factory. If when someone asked him what work he does for a living, and he answers well I put pieces of metal in a corner on a factory-site, Its unlikely to make much of an impression, however if he says that he's involved in the production of Rolls Royce's, well that changes how his listeners may respond...

How we talk about our faith and what we say about how Jesus has made a difference to us really matters...

We are all God has to use in making Jesus real for people....  
There is no plan B...

A camel was talking to her three-year-old. And like any three-year-old, the young camel began asking her mother a lot of questions

Mum, why do I have these huge two-toed feet?

"Well, when we go across the desert, your toes will help you stay on top of the soft sand."

"But why have I got these great long eyelashes"

"Well they will keep the sand out of your eyes on trips through the desert."

"But what about this big hump on my back?"

At this the mother camel began to be a little exasperated  
"They help us to store water during our long treks across the desert."

"So we have these huge feet to keep us from sinking in the desert, long eyelashes to keep the sand out of our eyes and humps to store water.

Mum I have just one more question."

"What in the world are we doing in London Zoo?"

We are designed by God for his church, for the Christian community, for each other....but we are also designed and empowered to take the good news about Jesus to those who don't know him.....and if we are not we are like camels in London zoo.

Were not meant to live sheltered lives huddled up together in an upper room talking about how nice it was when Jesus was with us.

All of us are at times tempted to do what those early disciples did... to look into heaven, wondering where Jesus has gone....

But we are to engage the world in the time and place in which God has placed us in so that we can make a difference and when we get to heaven we too will be able to look into someone eyes and say I told you it was paradise....

I have a favourite saying, although it was Julian of Norwich who wrote it... "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.'

Those words sum up maybe how the disciples left the mountain of ascension...the text tells us that they returned to Jerusalem with great joy....

They had gone from being poor fishermen, and rich Billy no mate tax collectors, they had gone from watching Jesus heal and raise the dead to watching him die and placed with the dead.

They had gone from hiding in an upper room for fear of their lives to putting their fingers in the holes in his risen hands....

And by the Ascension those early followers of Jesus had come to understand that the Resurrection was not just a physical reality, but that their faith was an on-going spiritual experience as well. It

was something that was a part of their everyday lives and something they just had to share...

While Jesus was on earth his ministry was limited, like us he could only be in one place at a time, but the moment he went back to heaven that ministry became limitless.

“Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations”...this is the call that we have all received...”

How will others find out that when at your lowest after the death of a spouse Jesus can make a difference?

How will others find out that when your sick and fearful for the future the presence of Jesus can give you hope?

How will others find out that there is a way through addiction and despair if we don't tell them?

Through us Jesus brings comfort to the sick and the dying, he gives friendship to the lonely and the stranger. He gives food to the hungry and shelter to the homeless. He gives hope ewhere there is none and joy where there is only sadness.

Through us he comes into the hearts of others when we grasp windows of opportunity that arise in just the normal patterns of of our everyday lives.

When the disciples were looking up into the sky to catch a final glimpse of Jesus, were told that two angels told them that he will one day return.

We are in the time between the ascension and that second return of our Lord which is nearer now than it has ever been.

The Kingdom of God has come but it is not yet here in all its fullness and completeness.

And so as we wait for that time, we have been given the task of carrying on Jesus' ministry with a promise that he will never leave or forsake us, that we will be given the words and the power when we need it but we need to open our mouths and step out in faith to get it.....

When those disciples had seen Jesus ascend they went back to Jerusalem where they worshipped God and so as we receive the

Eucharist tonight, let us ask that the presence of Jesus might renew and fill us afresh, that our lives might become a demonstration of his power in this community and that through our lives people may see that he too is alive.

**Amen**