**SERMON FOR ASCENSION SUNDAY | 16.05.2021**

**Acts 1: 1-11; Ephesians 1: 15-end: St Luke 24: 44-end**

**There are times when things just don’t go right. I don’t mean like at yesterday’s wedding when the sound from my radio mic didn’t work properly and there were 130 annoyed Australians in Brisbane using the ‘chat’ feature on the webcam to tell us to turn up the volume! That’s is just a technical glitch which we just have to live with – and hopefully iron out before the next time.**

**No this was much more serious, the session I had with Thomas our Baptism candidate in readiness for his Baptism next Sunday, last Thursday evening after Evening Prayer. The topic was sin and I had been reading up what I wanted to talk about for a fair bit of the afternoon.**

**What I hoped to discuss was ‘the dignity of being human’: the great gift that God has given to each of us in life: how he has made us wonderfully in his own image, with talents and skills to discover and enjoy - and how sin, in effect, throws that back in God’s face as we decide to go our own way, in other directions, and as a result end up being less than human. Not surprisingly we started off talking about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden - and the Fall.**

**Sadly the session then went horribly wrong. It had been – and continues to be – a terribly busy week with lots of additional services to prepare (including the wedding) and I had got myself massively over-tired. And that night I completely lost the thread of what I wanted to share and could hear myself floundering! *This is such precious time*, I said to myself: *what do you think you are doing… ?!***

**I tell that story because this Feast of the Ascension gives me a moment to tackle the same topic again – and hopefully to do it much better. (Thomas was very kind but it really wasn’t one of my better sessions…!) Somehow, as we see Jesus returning to his Father in heaven, with his disciples standing on the hillside watching him leave, we are reminded of that great Ascension-tide hymn, *Lord enthroned in heavenly splendour,* with its famous last line, *risen, ascended, glorified.***

**Familiar though it is to many of us, what does this famous line actually mean?**

**Whether you agree with his politics or not, Boris Johnson’s catch phrase ‘levelling up’ is a very shrewd slogan. It recognises that there are all too many people who find their family background, education and health really do hold them back from making use of their talents and abilities. Listening last night to a short profile on Radio 4 of Angela Rayner, deputy leader of the Labour Party, only served to remind me of these unfairnesses – and how courage and determination on her part had still not quite managed to overcome the fact that her accent and her unpolished style still makes her an outsider in many quarters.**

**The sheer indignity with which Jesus was treated in his three years of ministry – the constant outsider – is always shocking. The disdain of the Pharisees, the scorn of the Sanhedrin, is only the prelude to the utter disdain for him when he is battered and tortured and crucified. To his persecutors his body didn’t matter, his pain didn’t matter, he didn’t matter. *Better that one many should die than the whole nation be destroyed*: such a clever way of relativizing what was happening. Jesus would soon be forgotten. Just forget about him…**

**And that is so often our attitude too as we overlook the distress of so many in our inner cities, or the distress of the civilian populations in Gaza or in the streets of Myanmar. What dignity can the people in these situations expect to have? And we barely notice. Yet into those worlds as much as into our own comes Jesus who not only rises from the dead but then goes on to be ‘glorified’, his real status and dignity restored to him - in heaps! The tortured man carrying his cross is not who Jesus really is. The one standing in white as he stands on the hill at the Ascension: that is the true man, the true child of God, his dignity and status restored as it should be.**

**And it is the same every time someone falls and gets raised up: every time poverty is exposed and sorted, security provided, decent health achieved. That is ‘the hope’ in our second reading from Ephesians: that is the hope to which he has called us, our inheritance – the inheritance that comes from being ‘levelled up’. Where Christ goes, we go too; what Christ has, we can enjoy as well. We all matter.**

**The Ascension experience is not just a pretty picture to round off the Resurrection but the restoring of the dignity which we were all given at birth. And the call to give proper respect and dignity to all. Now.**