

## Ascension Day: Acts 1.1-11



On Ascension Day we revisit our belief set out in the Nicene Creed that *Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

And once again we read in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles the account of the Ascension of Jesus and of the angels who asked of the apostles, ‘*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*’

The words of the angels point us towards the next sentence of the Nicene Creed. *He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.*

So we believe that Jesus is in heaven. We no longer have to stare heavenward because Jesus intercedes for us in heaven. He takes care of that. Instead, we prepare on earth for his coming again in glory.

What difference does this make?

Last week I watched a film made by David Attenborough, ‘A Life on our Planet’. In the film, Attenborough uses his own life as a documentary film maker to chart the destruction of the planet over the last 70 years and its potentially appalling consequences for our children and grandchildren.

He explains how population growth and global warming are decisively destroying the ecological and physical balance of the earth and rapidly propelling us to a tipping point after which there will be return. In simple terms, if global warming isn’t halted in the next ten years or so, the polar ice caps will melt, the tundra will thaw, and

average temperatures will increase in ways which humanity will not be able to reverse. He paints a bleak picture.

And then suddenly the mood of the film changes abruptly. He explains that the solution is simple. We need a radically fairer sharing of the world's resources because when people are lifted out of poverty, they stop having large families. We need to rewild the earth and the oceans, generate our energy entirely from renewable sources, eat a lot less meat and then global warming will be halted, and the planet will recover, and future generations will be saved.

He talks about this as if it is all perfectly doable; as if a TV presenter can go round talking to world leaders, they will see the light and change everything, overcoming the objections of all those people whose greed propels them to continue to destroy the earth. Attenborough explains all this as if he is describing the life cycle of a bird of paradise in the rainforest of Papua New Guinea.

It's not as simple as that is it? Many, if not most, of our leaders are motivated by personal gain, not the long-term interests of humanity. Billions of people around the world need to coordinate their actions and make some pretty decisive changes pretty quickly if planet earth is to stand a chance. Many of these actions will feel like sacrifices. And why should anybody make a sacrifice if other people won't and it doesn't make any difference in the end?

What could create a transformation on the scale that is needed?

David Attenborough doesn't believe in God. He has been quoted as saying he can't believe in a loving God that can allow a world to exist where children die of horrible illnesses. So for him the only thing that can save humanity is humanity itself,; using its own understanding of what it must do to save itself and the planet.

On Ascension Day we remember the God who loves us. We remember his Son who sits at his right hand and intercedes for us. We remember the instruction of the angels that we must be busy on earth preparing for his coming again in glory.

There are almost 8 billion people living on earth. An estimated 2.3 billion are Christians. Billions more follow other faiths with whom our churches are in dialogue.

That's a lot of people who can pray to our creator God. And for Christians, we have faith that Jesus Christ intercedes for us, amplifying our prayers. So we do not have to be always staring heavenward. When our prayers are done, we can get on with the

urgent work that we have been called to do.

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