

The Adopted Life

Ascension Sunday ~ 06.05.2011

Ascension and Glorification

For Jesus, “being glorified” seems closely connected with (or even identified with) “ascending.” In the Upper Room, when Judas leaves the table to betray him, Jesus knows that the dominoes are about to start falling: Arrest... Crucifixion... Resurrection... Ascension. So it’s right at that moment when he says “NOW, the Son of Man is glorified” (John 13.31).

He goes on to unpack this for his disciples in the next few chapters of John, emphasizing the coming of the Holy Spirit and what will result from it: Namely, that they will share more intensely in Jesus’ peaceful relationship with the Father, and in Jesus’ conflictual relationship with the darkened world (John 14-16). These are the things that his glorification/ascension will accomplish. So when he speaks to Father directly at the end of his speech, he starts with “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son... Glorify me in your own presence with the glory I had in your presence before the world existed” (17.1, 5).

This is the context for my understanding of Ascension Sunday. It is about Jesus’ relocation from earth to heaven, yes, but the good news is that being in heaven means being present at every point on earth. It’s in this way that Jesus’ “flying away” fits with his words: “Surely I am with you” (Matt 28.20). How does he come “to fill the whole universe”? By “ascending higher than all the heavens” (Eph 4.10). Ascending/Being glorified means becoming present to us in a new way (John 14.20). And his presence with us is not mystical; it’s incarnational. Jesus is glorified in his ascension AND in those who believe in him (John 17.10). We could say the two things are one and the same. After all, we are “his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph 1.23).

~ John Stonecypher