

The Ascension Year A  
14/5/26

There's a certain arrogance in thinking that we prepare the ground for God when we go out to evangelise others. No, the good news is that it's God who prepares the ground for us wherever we go. The spur to the disciples' departure from their place of fear in the upstairs room is the fact now of Jesus being present everywhere, able to come and go freely, whatever the physical barriers, someone we now experience in the depths of our own spirit, a Holy Spirit no longer dependent on being seen or touched or heard so much as felt, as 'something understood.'

In this respect the Ascension represents a huge shift in our understanding, from one in which, ironically perhaps, we imagine God and all the hosts of heaven up there - inaccessible to us until death and judgement, and Jesus coming again, to one in which the kingdom of heaven is present to us on earth. There are not two kingdoms here but one, and we are being invited to live in this one reality here and now, suffused with the glory of God. It's this exciting vision that the disciples are now able to communicate to others as they live in it themselves without fear or favour. It's not a vision of a reality for a few people only, that re-creation of the upper room mentality we so readily go back to, but a realisation of the universality of God's reach, a re-creation of all that was, after all, originally made good - a new heaven and a new earth, fit for creatures such as us, fit again to know ourselves and to be known to the rest of creation as made in the image and likeness of God.

And so we come to 'Church' or not. The philosopher and neuroscientist Iain McGilchrist recently gave a talk on the WCCM (World Community of Christian Meditation) website entitled "Without Religion: no future" and this despite admitting at its start that he wasn't sure whether he was a Christian or not, but by the end of the talk and in response to some questioning he gave a witness to the all-encompassing validity of the Christian myth - used in its best sense - which could hardly have been bettered, largely, if I've got it right, because far from Religion, and the Church in particular, being a flight from reality, a retreat to an upper room, it brings body and spirit together both individually and collectively in a way that overcomes all those disintegrating elements, which are so strongly evident in today's world, which he characterises as left hemisphere dominance to the detriment of the more visionary and holistic practice of the right hemisphere.

Iain spent an enormous amount of time and effort in grounding his 'spiritual' insight in scientific reasoning and finds the incarnational thinking of Christianity as the best fit of any religion for his view of the human as needing necessarily both - that is, a Church in which we grow in relationship to one another and to God. It's God after all who prepares the ground for us wherever we go.

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