

## ASCENSION FEAST

---

Series: Encounters  
May 4, 2020  
Edgar King  
Pentecost  
John 21: 1-19

Last Thursday was the day in the church calendar called Feast of ascension. 40 days after the resurrection Jesus finishes his early ministry and takes up his place at the father's right hand. It is one of the days we have been pointing towards throughout our conversations after Easter. Some even call it the forty days of Easter.

That after Jesus rose from the dead, he stayed around for forty days appeared to hundreds of people. It is these appearances and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that made a faithless people have faith that transformed not only their lives but the whole world.

Before I get deep into our conversation today. I saw this post and thought it was funny. Some people might not like that but think about it. From the feast of ascension henceforth, Jesus was not only with us, but he is also in us through the Holy Spirit. Reminds me of the worship songs that said, "come and make our hearts your home".

So as Jesus works in us, like us he is working from home. And like him, we can change the world even working from home.

Anyway, Jesus has been making very important appearances that have been changing the lives of people. An encounter with the risen Jesus changes the trajectory of people's lives and sets them up ready to take their place in the story of the Kingdom in the next phase.

We saw Jesus appear to Mary to comfort her and affirming the place of the least of these because God always uses the things the world sees as foolish and lowly.

We saw Jesus appear to Thomas to comfort a hurting and bitter friend. And also to drive away doubt and deepen his faith and confession. From just messiah to my Lord and my God.

We saw Jesus appearing to Peter to love him, comfort him and restore him. Reminding him of his identity and his calling.

Then George took us through another encounter where Jesus at breakfast opened scripture to some of his disciples and pretty much showing them that God had always dreamt for our future, a future full of hope. Better than we could have dreamt of before we lost hope.

Today we will look at his last appearance before the ascension. At the end of the 40 days that I have been talking about.

We have been building up to this point. One of the peaks.

*Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

**Matthew 28:16-20**

You see, I find it interesting that even at this point some still doubted. I love the honesty of the stories these people tell. You would expect that if you are trying to cook up a story where the main deal died if you include a part where he came back from the dead why then talk about some people still not believing. It does not help the plot except if you are just trying to report the story.

You see, something interesting about the gospels, the first 4 books recording the life of Jesus is they have a lot of commentaries except for when they get to the death, resurrection and ascension part. It's like they are also saying, the other part I tell you what they mean but this part I can only tell you the story as it happened, Why? They also did not expect it.

Jesus being Messiah, they could buy that. Healing the sick, being the fulfilment of Scripture, he did strangely but they could buy it. But the death part and his resurrection and ascension, this was something they did not expect.

So there is no tidying up of the story. They say that he looked like the gardener, then keep telling us that some of them doubted even to the very end. They keep telling us how many times they wanted to turn back. And this is after the victory.

And I bring this up because I have so many times into this Livestream said that God is still moving and appearing to people. That the church and the world are having encounters with the risen Jesus and some of you have. And I am also aware that many will still struggle with disbelief. Did God really show up for me? Was that god or was it just excitement because the pastor kept saying it on the Livestream. Did God really heal me? Did God really speak?

And I love that heroes of faith tell their story and they do not hide that they struggled too. Even when he was right there. Here they are being inspired by the Holy Spirit to tell the story and they still remember how they struggled to believe. And maybe the writer is doing one of those, “I am speaking for a friend” things. He is saying some struggled and maybe he did.

So what changed? They received the Holy Spirit who leads us to all truth, as the continued to follow Jesus. On the journey Jesus showed himself faithful, they had more encounters the found more and more faith.

My invitation is be open to the Holy Spirit, keep following Jesus. He will show himself faithful and you will find more faith.

Here is the thing we are living in a society that keeps saying, that God should show up. God should show more proof of him. But even that does not mean they will believe, Jesus tells a story, abatable really of 2 guys who died and in the afterlife the one guy who had lived his life all wrong asks that the one now in the bosom of the father to be sent back to his family so that they believe because they would believe if someone rose from the dead.

And Jesus says, if they have all the witnesses they have and they still do not believe, even seeing the dead rise from the dead will not change that. And guess what? The story was not any different, some saw Jesus himself raise from the dead and still they did not believe. Because the struggle with faith is I think 2 things, 1 fear and 2 pride.

Some people are scared of surrendering to God and saying, I do not know, I only trust even when I do not understand.” Some are just too proud and pretend that it is our mental capacity that won’t allow us to embrace faith even when we know we are simply silencing our souls as they cry out for God.

The cure for both is, follow Jesus. He will show himself faithful, encounter you so many times and through the help of the Holy Spirit you will find faith.

2 years ago I really struggled with doubt and I got very scared. At that time my Laborite song was one that had a line saying “All my fears and doubts, they can come too because they won’t stay long.”

Anyway back to our story for today Jesus tells them that all authority and power has been given to him. Power is the ability to do something. And authority is this picture. It is during these times of curfew in Kenya the smallest and most frail-looking police officer, wearing his uniform only has to lift his hand and the biggest vehicle with so much engine power comes to a halt.

Why? He has the authority to do that. And his uniform and badge signify that. Otherwise, it might be a very sad story.

So Jesus says, he has all authority and all power, he can give whomever he wants. Then he says, because of this, I want you to go and do the following.

So he is looking at his team. Those wearing his uniform, those have put their faith in him. And get this, those who are still there though they struggle with doubt. He is saying, hey as long as you are on my team, wearing my jersey, following me even though you struggle with doubt, I want you to know, that all authority and power is mine and so you have my permission to do the following. It’s not for the A team or the B team or the wannabes it's for all of us.

And what are those? Make disciples baptise them, teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. Which simply means the ones you teach them to also do these things which are made disciples baptise and the cycle continues. And then he promises that He is with us all the end of time.

But Jesus, you are about to be taken up, How will you be with us? Well, the Holy Spirit is going to be given to us and this is how Jesus is with us. But that’s next week’s story.

Today I want us to talk about those things Jesus say now we can do because we are on his team and he has all authority and power. Making disciples, baptising people and teaching them to obey. But what does it even mean to make disciples?

A disciple devotes his life to follow his teacher. To do the things the teacher does and even, in this culture, speak like the teacher. So Jesus is saying that because he has all authority and power we are free to do and say the things he said and did and teach others to do the same. But what are those?

I want us to look at the story of the same day but by a different person

*He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name, they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”*

#### **Mark 16:15-20**

Jesus preached the Good news of the Kingdom of God and did the things of the Kingdom. He proclaimed forgiveness on people, signs and wonders followed him, he layed hands on the sick and they got well.

So anyone being formed to be like Jesus is being formed to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and demonstrate it. Speak over people burdened by sin that they are forgiven, signs and wonders will follow and they lay hands on the sick and train others to do the same.

Here is why I am bringing this up, for the course of this collection of talks, I have often said that Jesus is preparing the church to take its place in the story of the Kingdom in the season that is coming. Jesus is calling you to take your place in the story of the Kingdom of God one the season that is coming. After COVID or as the world learns to live with COVID.

And sometimes we forget what our mandate is. Sometimes we act as if making disciples is for the priest and the pastor or for when we have a bit of time. No, it's a command.

Guess what, sometimes we think that praying for the sick is for when we are bold enough or successful enough, no, this is the calling.

We do not teach people about Jesus in the season or the one that is coming when it is convenient or when we are in a religious job, no. We teach people about Jesus because that is what obedience calls for.

We do not pray for the sick because everyone we have ever prayed for, got well or at least a good percentage of them. No, we do it because this is obedience. This is the job.

We do not feed the hungry because we are employed by a charity organisation or work for the church, or when you have a lot of money or food no you should feed the hungry. After all, this is what Jesus did.

We do not pray for the world because we know what is going to happen tomorrow morning but because this is the obedience.

We do not love one another because finally, we are ready to grow, but this is obedience. To be disciples and make disciples.

And back to the question of whether we doubt or are unsure. Yes, even when we are unsure we pray for the sick, we love the world, we love one another.

The leader of the Vineyard movement in the UK tells the story of how they came back to faith. They did not even, they were living in sin. Heck, they did not wanna believe because it meant radically changing their lifestyle. For some reason, they start going to church. And in this Vineyard church, they talked a lot about praying for the sick. So one of them goes and tries it out. Not because they believed, it was the only option they had for a friend who was very sick.

The shock on them when this friend actually got healed. Why? Because Jesus backs his promises with his power and authority. If we are going to be disciples and declare the KOG and demonstrate it by praying for the sick, loving the least of these, loving one another, praying for the world Jesus will back his promise to be with us in his power. He has given us the authority to do it.

But what I do not want is to miss is these 3 things. It is in the following of Jesus that we get faith. It is in the journey that we finally can get to a point of saying, surely we experienced God. Most of these people wrote the story later on and in their old age. Because they kept on following Jesus and he kept on backing their authority with his power.

Two, Making disciples, baptising people, healing the sick, loving the world, loving one another, casting out evil spirits are not optional for the disciple. It is a question of obedience. And we do not do it when we have more time on our hands, we do not do it coz we are in the job position to do it and we do not do it coz we have been successful at it, we do it because this is what Jesus did and asked us to do.

Lastly, to remember that Jesus through the Holy Spirit is with us as we do this. We have the authority and he backs it up with his power. We just need, like the police officer, to put on the right uniform

Let's pray