

Group Notes 5 June 2011

Ascension

Welcome - Ice Breaker

What is the most revolting task you have ever had to undertake?

Word - Sermon Summary: John 13:1-14

Ascension Day was on Thursday 2 June (40 days after Easter Sunday, so it's always a Thursday) and so we celebrated it on Sunday 5. What a wonderful theme! After redeeming the world through his incarnation (Christmas), his cross (Good Friday) and his resurrection (Easter), Jesus ascends to the place of victory in God's presence and sits down. Just like God resting after the work of creation, Jesus rests after the work of salvation. He's on the throne as King of kings and Lord of lords, worthy of all honour, glory and praise.

So why have a reading where Jesus washes people's smelly feet? It starts off well enough. Jesus knows that God has given everything into his hands, v.3. He's come from God and is about to return to God, v.1. He is fully aware that he is Lord and Master, v.13. This is it – He's preparing for the throne! But then what does he do? Typical Jesus, you never know what he'll get up to next. He gets a bowl of water and a towel and there he is... This is the most awesome sight in the Bible, that the King of kings and Lord of lords should want to humble himself like a servant and wash my feet. What on earth is going on?

What's happening actually is that Jesus is kissing the frog. It's like the story of the Frog Prince backwards! Just like that story it's a love story – Jesus the Crown Prince of the Universe loves us to the end, v.1. As the frog and the princess are so different to each other, we are very different from Him. Like the frog in the story, we aren't very attractive! We hurt one another, ignore each other's needs, and wreck the world for selfish greed – so unlike the way God wants us to be.

But Jesus went ahead and kissed the frog anyway – but unlike the story, he got changed into a frog too. Well, not a frog, but into a human being just like us. At the first Christmas he became like us in every way: babyhood, childhood, adulthood; hunger and thirst, sadness and happiness, making friends and losing them. It went further. Through the cross he shared further in our experience of suffering and pain, rejection and betrayal. He even experienced sin there as the sins of the world were heaped on his shoulders. Then he experienced death itself... It seemed that he had become a frog in every way, ending up where we all end up in the shadow of the grave.

But that's not the end of the story! That's not why Jesus came. He didn't come just to be a prince turned into a frog. He came to turn frogs into princes and princesses! By coming and sharing in our nature Jesus is able to lift us up to share in His glory for ever! That's what Ascension Day is all about. It is not only Jesus who is seated on the throne in glory. He wants us there with him, to reign with him in that glory for ever. Ascension Day is the pointer to the eternal destiny God wants us to have in Jesus.

But we too must kiss a frog to get to our destiny. If we choose Jesus, not everything will look attractive and some things may put us off. Our lifestyle may have to change, to love, to forgive and do other hard things. We are no longer in charge of our own lives, but we are answerable to God. We are committed. There's glory, joy, peace and love in that commitment – but are we willing to pay that price? Will we kiss the frog?

Word 2 - Discussion Questions:-

How many adverts can you think of that are about transforming your life?

- Do you think any of these products work?
- Why do you think people are drawn to adverts that promise our lives will be transformed (or for that matter to stories like the frog prince)?
- Is there a dissatisfaction within us, with the way our lives are, that we feel driven to fill?
- Does God speak through that dissatisfaction?

What aspects of the Gospel do you think are most off-putting to people who are not yet Christians?

- What holds them back from "kissing the frog"?
- Can anyone remember what held them personally back from committing to Jesus before becoming a Christian?
- How can we help our not yet Christian friends through this? Should we try to play down the challenge? Or be upfront about it?

Many people might take washing other people's feet (the job of a slave in the New Testament era) as a sign of weakness or even inferiority. Jesus seems to have been just the opposite – he did it with full confidence in his mastery. It's because he knows he is the master of destiny that he does it – look at that "so..." at the start of v.4.

- Can you identify with this confidence that Jesus had? Is it something we can share too?
- Do you know anyone who is free to show their vulnerable side, not through weakness but through confidence?
- Could knowing that Jesus is reigning on the throne for us and calling us to share his glory make us big-headed?
- Or does it give us the confidence to humble ourselves and leave the consequences to him?

Worship Ideas

Find *That's my King* Dr S.M. Lockridge – [Official] on You Tube and watch / listen to it as a group.

Works / Witness

Alpha Course this autumn

We had a great Alpha preparation meeting last Wednesday – thank you to all the groups who sent someone to represent them. Could your rep give feedback about what is happening with Alpha. Could you then discuss how your group would like to be involved, for example in prayer (vitally important!), catering, leading discussions, promotion, setting up and organising, follow up, or inviting friends along.