

Ascending Fear: Jesus' Absence and Our Authority

'Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you.' (Jn 16:6)

Jesus had to leave us in order to liberate us. He had to depart in order to give us power. But for the disciples, Jesus' ascension back to the Father may have felt more like abandonment than the assurance of authority.

Think about it. Jesus' followers just got in the groove with the Resurrected Christ. (It took a while--remember? They failed to recognize him for days!) Just when they were in step with Him, the Lamb is swallowed up by a cloud. (Acts 1:9)

Jesus, now absent, gives disciples like us His Spirit—powerful and pervasive, but unseen. The Spirit demands our faith and action based on His leading. Yet His instructions are more whispers than proclamations. And we are imperfect 'receptors' at best, as inclined to our own darkness as we are to the light. How we long for Jesus-in-the-flesh declaring: 'This is the way; walk in it!'

That means that we His disciples have to face our fears of ourselves: Can we do this? Was that a prophetic dream or a delusion? What if we obey that still small voice and turn out to be wrong?

What a risky God—entrusting us with continuing His reign of heaven on earth.

Scary stuff! I remember what I felt to be the Spirit's leading to attend a university discussion on 'Homosexuality, the Bible and Faith.' In spite of all the major denominations represented, the course had little to do with any genuine respect for the Bible or faith; it was intent only on asserting 'gay rights.'

I had only been a Christian for 6 months but I already knew that no-one there knew anything about genuine conversion. So I said so: 'If Jesus really died for us, then we must die to our right to assert anything other than His rule and reign in our lives.' I wasn't voted most popular student that year.

But I did grow in faith because I learned to follow His lead. And He trusted me to step out, however awkwardly, and proclaim His rule and reign. He does so with any willing vessel.

This is the principle of Ascension: He must depart in order for His Spirit to empower us to extend His Kingdom on earth.

That principle applies to our letting people go in order to help them grow. Our releasing them releases the Spirit who will lead them beyond where we can take them.

I see this all the time in ministry. In order for men and women to become leaders, I must release them to step out and take risks. They won't rely upon the Spirit as much if I am around. My presence may well be quenching the very Spirit that is straining to do great things through them.

'Anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.' (Jn 14:12)

I also see this in parenting. Annette and I and most of our friends worked hard to be the best parents possible. And then, guess what? It isn't enough! Our kids may still make bad, Spirit-free choices that grieve us terribly. That's where Ascension comes in. Our kids' departure from the Light doesn't stop the Spirit from brooding, imploring, and ordering all things for the good in their lives.

But parents get in the way of Holy Spirit when we try to be that Spirit. Like Jesus Himself, we must entrust our kids to the One who knows and loves best. We do our part yes—but it is the wise parent who knows when (s)he can do no more but pray. Confessing our fears and controlling schemes only to God, we entrust the son or daughter to the Ultimate Parent. His Spirit will have His Way.

Ascension reduces us to prayer. We grieve and let go and make room for God. Jesus left in order to free us to become people of the Spirit. Might we do the same for those we love most?

'You may ask for anything in My Name, and I will do it.' (Jn 14:14)

'When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you [and your loved ones!] into all truth.' (Jn 16:13)