

Ascension Sunday

The ascension is one of those events in the Bible that I've struggled to get my head fully around.

Firstly, there the question of why did Jesus have to go – wouldn't it have been nice for him to stick around?

Secondly, it's about the significance. It happened, but why is it so important?

But as I was thinking about it this week, two images kept coming into my head – and I'm going to talk about one

Relay race

In a relay, only one person can have the baton at a time. The heart of the race is getting the baton down the line. The baton is the most important thing, the runners are mere carriers. If the baton is dropped, the race is over.

This is what the ascension is about, passing something on, tag teaming to the next person.

There is a bigger underlying narrative and task that the ascension is only part of.

Underlying everything is God's big plan of salvation.

In the beginning we see the Trinity of God working together to make the perfect world and have people living in it. When people turn their own way and sin comes in, so the plan of salvation starts.

God the Father, Yahweh, runs the first leg, his role is working with the people of Israel and helping them to understand that they need God's help. They cannot save themselves and even the best bunch of rules and a complex set of religious practices cannot dig them out of the mess that they've got themselves into. In this first part we see the problem.

Then he wants the baton to God the Son, Jesus. Jesus comes to show the love of God, to proclaim the coming of God's kingdom and then to die to win us forgiveness and rise again to bring in the new life available to us all. Jesus takes the problem and solves it.

That was his task and when he finishes the task, he hands on the baton.

And who does he hand it on to? He hands it onto us. And our part within the race, within God's plan of salvation, is to take the good news of Jesus to the ends of the earth. We get to share that the problem is solved and that people can have hope.

The ascension happened because this is Jesus handing on the baton to us. We have the honour of being part of God's amazing plans.

Now, of course, and we'll look at this next week, we have a partner in this task, God the Holy Spirit. So it's not a leg of the race that we are running alone. But we'll look at that next week.

But, what's the "so what" of today – why is the ascension so important? It comes down to the baton. We have been handed the baton, the task from God, to tell people that the big problem of mankind has been solved. The baton is in our hand – what do we do? There are three possible outcomes when you've got the baton.

You stop running – not that interested in this, got better things to do, give up on faith

You drop the baton – still carry coming on to church, but church is less of a movement of faith and more a social club with singing

You keep on running and you keep on running all the way to the line. Jill would say that when you run a race, as you approach the line, you don't look at the line, you look 5 or 10 meters beyond so that as you cross the line, you cross at full speed. You run all the way.

So may you run that race. May you look at the baton that has been placed into your hand. May you remember how awesome and important the task that you have been given is. And may you, strengthened by the Holy Spirit run all the way to the line. And, because of your effort in Christ, may others be blessed and pick up the baton themselves and run that od may be glorified in everything.