



Sermon Ascension Sunday 24.5.09

Eph 4.7-16 and Lk 24.44-end

Intro

I don't know much about rap music, but one of its most famous stars was the musician and actor Tupac Shakur who has sold over 75 million albums, mostly on the themes of violence and hardship in inner cities, racism and other social problems. Tupac died after a shooting incident in 1996 but last week a rumour circulated that he was in fact alive and well and living in a small town in New Zealand. The rumours could have been proved true by meeting Tupac and hearing him perform again, with his unique style and charisma ... but sadly it all proved to be a hoax!

After the death of JESUS, a rumour was circulated that he had been raised back to life. I happen to believe this was true (!) but many people believed & continue to believe it was false. Again, the matter could easily be settled by meeting Jesus and hearing him speak and act with his unique style and charisma, so WHY DIDN'T Jesus stay permanently on earth after the resurrection?

1. Because everything predicted by Scripture must happen to Jesus (Lk 24.44).

Isaiah 52.13 'See, my servant will act wisely, he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.'

Psalm 68.18 is also thought to refer to Jesus in saying 'when you ascended on high.'

2. Because of the wider mission of Jesus

As we have seen previously, whereas the first Exodus was about the freeing of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the prophets towards the end of OT times, had arrived at a far bigger vision of New Exodus through which all people would be freed from all kinds of oppression.

For instance Isaiah 49.6 where God says 'It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.'

- transport and communication issues here, especially in the ancient world?!?

RATHER THAN the physical presence of his Son in countless places, cultures, languages, God chose in his wisdom to achieve his plan through countless missionary disciples. In a sense one body has been replaced by lots of bodies (*but more on this point below!*)

3. This strategy requires the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 15.26-27, Luke 24.49) AND the Holy Spirit cannot come until Jesus has returned to the Father (John 16.7).

WITH ME SO FAR??



Now let's turn to Ephesians. Early on in the letter (1.20-23) we learn that Jesus has been seated at the right hand of God the Father, above every authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given, in this age and the age to come.

Then in 2.6-7 Paul explains that all people who are saved by God's grace are in effect seated with Jesus in the heavens. This is so that in the coming ages God might show the incomparable riches of his grace. And 2.10 – we have been saved by God's grace SO THAT we can do the good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do (*the order is important*).

Now, Ephesians 4 explains HOW this will happen, especially v8 and v10 onwards. The Ascension happened SO THAT Jesus could pour out his gifts through the Holy Spirit...

Then v11 these gifts enabled believers to be apostles, prophets etc...

Why? V12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, ... for building up the body of Christ...

To what end? V13 until we ALL attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

WOW!

So the Ascension prepares the way for Pentecost which equips all believers for ministry and for mission – God's mission of setting free all people and all creation from sin, death and futility.

I said earlier that the one body of Jesus has been replaced by the millions of bodies of spirit filled Christians at work in the world. But in another very important sense there is still only one body – as Paul emphasises in 4.12 and 15-16. This challenges us to see ourselves NOT primarily as individual Christians who have a personal relationship with God through Jesus – but as parts of a single body, intimately joined to all other Christians, growing together, suffering together, building each other up and showing God's love to the world TOGETHER.

Allow this emphasis to challenge us and change us into what we should be!

SO the answer to the smart question 'where is this Jesus who you say is alive?' is...

HERE and HERE and HERE... You can see his DNA, the proof of his life, in the life of this person and this person and this person... in the life of this loving, growing community, the Church.

FINAL ILLUSTRATION – LEARNING TO SWIM



How my dad taught me to swim

Armbands fully inflated
I learn to copy strokes

Dad gradually lets air out

If I start to panic & sink,
His arm supports me

No air left, his arms still under me

Eventually he steps away to prove
to me that I can swim alone, as
he taught me. The buoyancy of the
water keeps me afloat

How Jesus enabled his disciples

Disciples learn to live like Jesus
and to teach and heal

Disciples are sent in pairs

cf Peter walking on water

Cross, then Resurrection

= Disciples after the Ascension. Actually
Jesus will still be with them as the HS.
HS is like buoyancy of water, working
with our faith

Christian life is like swimming

- Good healthy exercise makes us stronger
- The more we practice it, the more confident we get
- If we fell off a boat we would be able to swim to safety
- If a STRONG swimmer we could even get to safety if the water is rough or cold
- We might also be able to rescue someone else who has fallen in
- Best swimmers can become lifeguards or swimming teachers!

Conclusion

Learn to swim / to be a follower of Jesus. Practice to become a better, stronger swimmer / follower ... a lifesaver, a teacher of discipleship...

Tupac, just like Elvis or Beethoven continue to "live on" as people listen to and are affected by their music.

Jesus continues to live on in a more powerful, real and immediate sense, one body, made up of many, saving the world in his name and his power.