

no one who has watched even one “Star Trek” episode can have missed Captain Kirk or his crew being beamed up by a transporter beam.

So, that is just like the Ascension, right?

Wrong. The Ascension of Jesus is not a device to get him back into heaven from whence he came. Jesus departs alone, leaving his disciples behind, staring into empty space, as a cloud takes him out of their sight. I am sure from the point of view of the disciples they would have preferred to have gone with him. Having seemingly lost him when they laid him in a tomb surely they would not want to let go a second time. But Jesus goes alone, back to his father.

And why does that matter?

Because our work is not done on earth. We learn more about that work from Jesus’ prayer for his disciples – and us – in the gospel reading for today: “And now I am no

longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.”

This farewell prayer is said, not just for the small band of family and followers, but also for each of us. The good news here is that Jesus prays openly for us, for our protection and our unity so that we might be one, as Jesus and the Father are one.

Jesus also tells us, shortly before his Ascension, what eternal life means for us: “that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

The Ascension makes Jesus accessible to all people, not just his disciples in a particular historic moment. He prays for all people, and all may call upon him. There is no limit to accessing him, no request too small.

Every life is full of goodbyes in varying degrees – from saying “goodbye” to someone who has served us in a shop, to the pain of losing someone or something that has given meaning and value to our life. It could be saying

goodbye to a loved one, a pet or a precious object, to familiar surroundings, or to our youth as we grow older.

The musician and writer Nick Cave and his wife, Susie Bick, lost their fifteen-year-old son Arthur in a tragic accident in 2015. When, in 2019, someone asked him, “How do we say goodbye?”, he responded by writing:

... to say goodbye is an act of appreciation for the past that we have moved beyond, and a prelude to the new you that will, in time, require its own goodbye, and as you continue to grow, further goodbyes, each a rehearsal for the final, most precious goodbye of all.

Jesus left so that we might grow.

Just as children must leave home in order that they too might grow, from the simple departing of young children starting school. Who has not had a tear in their eye as they

toddler begins nursery or the reception class. Or when as young adults they leave for university.

In the Easter season, we are continually drawn to stories about Jesus’ pastoral care for us. He walks to Emmaus with the troubled disciples who had hoped he would redeem Israel, and then helps them see his risen life and the power it holds for them as they begin to share the Good News with others. He cooks breakfast for his friends on the shore of the lake, and they know through this simple act of hospitality how deeply he cares for them, and we know how deeply he cares for all of us.

And it is because he deeply cares for us that he had to go, the Ascension was because he loves us.

The Ascension is such a strange festival in the life of the church. To our modern minds it does not make sense that Jesus should travel upwards, we know what is up there, beyond the clouds. It would make far more sense to our 21st century minds if Jesus did indeed return to his father in the way that Captain Kirk was beamed up by Scotty.

Jesus does not come and go on a transporter beam.

Amen

Whatever the mechanics of it all Jesus returned to his father so that we might grow, grow in him and grow in the Holy Spirit. Whatever the complexities of theology are surrounding the ascension we must look beyond them and just experience what that mystery means to us. It's a bit like electricity. When you turn on the light you don't stop and think about and say to yourself: **Electricity** is a form of energy. **Electricity** is the flow of electrons. All matter is **made** up of atoms, and an atom has a center, called a nucleus. The nucleus contains positively charged particles called protons and uncharged particles called neutrons. No, you say: I'm glad I turned on the light because now I can see what I'm doing.

So rather than getting in a muddle about the ascension, lets celebrate what it brings to us.

Ascension means: That Jesus now abides in us and in the church in a personal and unique way. That we have the Holy Spirit to guide, comfort and strengthen us.

This is what we celebrate at Ascension tide.