

Rising to Grace
May 29, Ascension, 2022

He was one of us
 Son of Man, child of Mary,
 A human being,
 made of flesh and bone,

Feel your hands
 His were just like yours

Had a heart beating within his chest
 A heart that warmed and raced and broke,
A mind that soared and pondered
 And eyes that sometimes could not stop weeping
 Like ours this week.

He was blessed, tempted, befriended, tormented.
Who knew tenderness, and savagery and practiced forgiveness.
 He taught us
 To love ourselves
 To love our neighbor
 To love our enemies
 All as God loves us
 And to lay down our lives for one another

And then he did
 Rather than take back what he'd taught us
 Rather than to deny the Christ within him.
 To renounce those who said there was no God
 but Caesar, or corrupt religious power,
 both who proclaimed
 God lived by their limits.

Death might have ended Jesus' life
 But not the Christ within him.
 Christ arose.
 On Easter morn
 And then, once more and finally
 according to both Matthew and Luke.

Luke gives us two accounts of the ascension.
 The one David read
 And again, in the

Book of Acts of the Apostles.

The Risen Jesus, still bearing the scars of his mortal life
Has been appearing among his followers
On the 40th day, the disciples asked him:

Lord is this the time when you will restore the kingdom?

Still hoping it seems for what Judas and the rebels wanted
for that kingdom of Israel
to rise again in glory and power.

Jesus was always speaking of the Kingdom of God.
And he does, again:

“Yes, you will receive power
from the holy spirit
to be my witnesses”

*Mou martyres in Luke’s original language:
my martyrs*

*the holy spirit will give you power to bear
the cost of following me.*

And then he is raised up.

The scarred, resurrected one,
becomes Divine light and grace
his human journey ended,
enfolding into the pervasive presence
Of the Eternal
Jesus becomes Christ for the world.

Here is a poem by Anglican priest and poet Malcolm Guite,

*We saw his light break through the cloud of glory
Whilst we were rooted still in time and place
As earth became a part of Heaven’s story
And heaven opened to his human face.*

*We saw him go and yet we were not parted
He took us with him to the heart of things
The heart that broke for all the broken-hearted
Is whole and Heaven-centred now, and sings,*

*Sings in the strength that rises out of weakness,
Sings through the clouds that veil him from our sight,
Whilst we ourselves become his clouds of witness
And sing the waning darkness into light,*

*His light in us, and ours in him concealed,
Which all creation waits to see revealed.*

His light in us
We enabled by the power of the spirit
To be his martyrs, his witnesses.

His light in us
seems deeply concealed this week
And our readiness to be his martyrs, his witnesses
challenging.

I wanted to hear the voice of a victim
And found Taylor Schumann, who was shot through a door
By a young man with a gun at her college in Virginia,
bullet fragments lodged in her eye.

Taylor is an evangelical Christian
And this is her witness:

I believe in the power of prayer deeply.
And I think when we pray about gun violence
we are not always open to hearing what God has to say.

Are we really willing to be used to reduce this violence?
If God's answer to our prayers requires personal sacrifice,
are we willing to hear that?

Every single year, 40,000 image-bearers of Christ
are taken from this earth by these acts,
If we are truly pro-life, must we not speak for life?

40,000 image bearers, including all those children

What happens when we think of one another this way?

When our understand of Christ for the world
Means Christ in all?

Caryll Houselander

was on the underground train in London,
A crowded train in which all sorts of people
jostled together

Suddenly, she says

I saw with my mind, Christ in them all.

*Christ in every one of them,
living in them, dying in them, rejoicing in them,
sorrowing in them*

*I came out into the street and walked for a long time in the crowds.
It was the same here, on every side,
in every passerby – Christ.”*

*I had long been haunted by the Russian conception
of the humiliated Christ,
the lame Christ limping through Russia,
begging His bread;
the Christ who, all through the ages,
might return to the earth and come even to sinners
to win their compassion by His need.*

*Now, in the flash of a second, I knew that this dream is a fact . . .
Christ in us*

Alright, we say, but what do we do with those who commit such
Horrible crimes, surely Christ is not in them.

*But Yes, she says, their sin is in reality their utmost sorrow
Christ is suffering in them.
Even in those sinners whose souls seem to be dead.*

*Because Christ
Who is the life of the soul, is dead in them.
They are his tombs,
yet from such tombs he can rise.*

The Christ weeps in those
 who have no mercy
 these angry, broken, manipulated
 sick, and likely grieving men.

 pleading: Stop, stop, stop.....

But Christ, there, too, in that classroom of holy innocents
 And in their teachers, their holy mothers
 spreading their arms like angel's wings
 that they would know God's love in death.

Christ dwelled in them,
 And they rose with Christ
 Each elder, each child, each teacher,
 rose to light, to grace upon grace.

And we, we here in this room
 With hearts that beat, and minds that ponder
 And hands fit for work

We have been given power by the holy spirit
We, says the risen Lord, not the kingdoms of the earth
 We have been given power to become Christ witnesses,
 Christ's martyrs.

Paul says to the church at Ephesus:
 *God will give to you,
 A spirit of wisdom and revelation
 So that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened
 You may know what is the hope
 to which he has called you.*

Let us feel the Christ within our bones
 Within our tears, within our voice.
 Let us bear witness
 To the Christ within
 In Jesus' name. Amen.

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