

Good morning. I am the Reverend Canon Gwynn Lynch. Some of you know me. I'm seeing people here...I wasn't expecting to see here. (You know who you are.) It's my great pleasure to be with you here this morning...Father Mark Hargreaves is in London for his daughter's wedding, and I am here to share a few words about the Ascension.

So, you heard...I have a very fancy title, the Reverend Canon. I am the Canon to the Ordinary in the Diocese of San Diego, and I know you don't know what that means. No one does. So, the Ordinary is the Bishop. The Ordinary is the Bishop and Canons are assistants. So, I am the Bishop's main assistant. So, you could call me the Bishop's assistant, but that's not nearly as fun as having a fancy title, because we like a churchy word for everything. I'm very glad to be here to celebrate Ascension Sunday with you. I will also give you a little reminder just in case you forgot it's Mother's Day. There's still time to do something about it.

I was happy when I looked into your bulletin to see the artwork that is included in there about the Ascension. I guess one of these windows is the Ascension window, and there's a picture of that in your bulletin too. *[gesturing]* Oh, right over there, lower down. You can see it's like...exactly what you expect the Ascension to look like in art, right? Jesus is floating on clouds. There are beautiful rays coming around Him.

I had a little prayer book when I was a little Roman Catholic girl, and it looked just like that. So, you can look through your bulletin to see some of these other expressions in art of what the Ascension might have looked like. A Lutheran pastor friend of mine told me about a pencil drawing that she saw in a church in Germany, and indeed Christ was ascending up into heaven and was probably right around here *[gesturing high up]*, and Saint Peter is holding onto Jesus's foot, and the rest of the disciples are holding on to Peter, trying to keep Him from going away. And frankly I get that. I get that. I don't think if I was one of Jesus's disciples, I would be all that happy to see Him ascending into heaven.

It's been a wild ride for them for the last 40 to 50 days. There was this dreadful weekend where Jesus was dead. And then this miracle occurs and now He's been with them. He has been traveling with them, He's been teaching them. They know that He's alive because He eats food. They have a leader again. They have a leader again. They have given up a lot to follow alongside Him. And they've had it affirmed that they were on the right track. They were on the right track. And I just cannot imagine having lost Him once, that I would be very happy about losing Him again.

And besides their personal feelings, there are also some nationalistic things that we're seeing in here. "Lord, is this the time when you'll restore the kingdom to Israel?" That is a very nationalistic, holy hope of theirs. So, they are still really focused on Jesus in the here and now, in the present.

So, I got to wondering. I got to wondering, why did Jesus have to ascend to heaven? And if you read the Catechism, which is in the back of your prayer book just in case you wanted to check it out, if you read the Catechism or you read some very theological reasons, you might say to yourself, "I'm not sure I really get what that's going for. Why did Jesus have to ascend to heaven? Why couldn't Jesus just stay? Why couldn't Jesus just stay and live among us?"

And so then I really went down the rabbit hole, because you can go down the rabbit hole with that, right? So would Jesus change His clothing with the Spirit, the fashions of the time? Would His hair grow? Would He still eat? *[reacting to noise from her microphone]* Is this me bumping around making all that noise? Might be. It is. People are nodding their heads. I will try to stand still. It's hard.

Back to my thought. So, going down that rabbit hole, what if Jesus had stayed around? What if Jesus had remained on earth? Where would He live? And really, what would we do with Him? What would we do with Him here in our midst? Maybe there wouldn't be any religious disagreements. There'd never be a religious war because we could just call Jesus and ask Him His

opinion on any of the foolish things that we have battled over the years. We could say, "Jesus, is it okay to have candles on the altar? Jesus, is it okay to face another direction than East? Jesus, can women be priests?" He could solve all of our problems for us. Maybe we wouldn't need denominations because everybody would know exactly what to do. Jesus would be just there ready for us whenever we needed Him.

But if Jesus had stayed around and we follow this line of thinking, the danger is that it becomes all about what we personally need. What do I personally need today? What is my little problem? And Jesus is right here for me.

And yes, Jesus is here for me, but Jesus is here for the whole world. And while the disciples are getting closer and closer to getting it, closer and closer to really understanding who Jesus is and how Jesus is really going to transform the world, they are still stuck in thinking about Jesus in a very parochial sense. "Jesus will be just here with us here in Israel."

Next Sunday at Pentecost, we will see the disciples transformed with the coming of the Holy Spirit. And on that day and after, we see the disciples ready to share Christ with the whole world. But at this point, while they're getting closer, they are still limited in how they see Jesus. They are still seeing Jesus as being local. They can only see Him in terms of solving their immediate desires and their immediate problems. They're trying hard to make Jesus into a small god with a lowercase G rather than Lord of all and King of Kings.

Jesus is not intended to just be a handy guy to have around when there are disagreements. He's the king of heaven, not bound by time or location or body. Jesus has ascended into heaven, leaving the work of the kingdom of God for us to do with the help and guidance and love of the coming Holy Spirit.

And so, the ascension of Jesus is not an afterthought in God's great plan for humanity. It is a critical moment, a moment where we see that no

matter how much we love Jesus, we cannot hold Him in place forever. We must share Christ with the world.

And we've not been abandoned. We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, the power which will make it possible for us to go out and do the work of spreading the kingdom of God. Christ's last words to His disciples were, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth."

The angel asked the disciples, "Men of Galilee, why are you looking toward heaven?" Let go. We can let go. We can be at peace that the disciples let go. Christ has ascended to the right hand of God in heaven, and there He has made a place for us. We can be sure of that place in heaven. And we can trust that in the meantime, instead of looking toward heaven, we can look around ourselves to see all the places and people with whom we can share the love of God. And so, in the name of the resurrected and ascended Christ, we pray, Amen.