

CAUGHT UP IN ALL THE GLORY OF GOD

In Shakespeare's play "Twelfth Night," most of the cast are confused for most of the time. There is this young man called Cesario who keeps appearing in more than one place at one time. Antonio the sailor says that Cesario has been staying with him for the last three months and Count Orsino declares this to be impossible because Cesario has been employed as his servant for that same period of time. Beautiful Lady Olivia throws her arms around Cesario and calls him "husband," the husband she had married just that afternoon; Cesario pushes her away, looking totally blank and denies that he has even seen her that day. At that precise moment Sir Toby runs in with blood pouring from his forehead, claiming that Cesario has just hit him, when for the last twenty minutes Cesario has been onstage in full view of the cast. As the play reaches its climax, everybody is getting very cross and there is a lot of shouting going on. Then suddenly: total silence. The cast gaze in open-mouthed horror as they see Cesario now apparently standing both on the left hand side of the stage and on the right. "*How have you made division of yourself?*" whispers Antonio. The answer of course is the one which the audience have known all along- identical twins.

I was in a similar situation myself once, only this time it was a cat that confused me. I owned a large black cat and he was a very clever and resourceful animal. But I could not understand how it was that I saw him one minute curled up on the bed and the next at the bottom of the garden. How could he simultaneously be standing out in the road in front of the house and lurking in the bushes at the back of the house. Again, there was a rational explanation: without knowing it, I had become the owner of two black cats. The second cat was a stray who had worked out that the best possible place in which to take refuge was the house in which there was another black cat.

Flesh and blood is flesh and blood and, as such, is subject to physical limitations. A man or a cat with a body made up of flesh and blood cannot be in two places at once because our physical bodies are constricted by the laws of space and time. If my body is now in the pulpit and would prefer to be in the pub then it must move from the one place to the other. It must occupy a different space at a different time. It cannot be simultaneously in both pub and pulpit. This is basic natural science.

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Many people have found it difficult to believe in a God they cannot see. It all seems suspiciously like a con trick to them. How can they, as rational human beings be expected to believe in, to obey, to be guided by a god who is not visible? Why cannot God take a physical form? Then we could see him with our eyes, we could hear him with our ears, we could touch him and be sure that he was real. We would have proof that God exists. We could show him to people who say that they do not believe.

But if God had a physical form then God would surely be subject to physical limitations. God could only be found in one place at one time. If he were here in this church at 10:30 on a Sunday morning, then he could not also be at the Methodist Church down the road or at All Saints' Church on the other side of the High Street. Maybe God could do as the Pope does and minister to thousands in a great open space like St Peter's Square in Rome but even so, there would be millions more who would not see him or hear him.

And this is why we today can preach a God who is divine, yet present in the physical things of life; a God who is able to reach us and fill us and interact with us in the places where we are; a God who is not remote and “other-worldly” but a God who is inextricably bound up with our lives in this world. We preach Jesus Christ, God once human, now for ever with us.

When we break bread together, do we not share in the body of Christ, we ask at our Communion Service?

When we drink wine, do we not share in the very lifeblood of Christ?

This is how it all works:

When we love, we love with the love of Christ;

When we forgive out of love, we share in the forgiving power of Christ;

When we make sacrifices in love, we share in the self-sacrifice of Christ

When we show compassion to those in need, we share in the compassion of Christ

When we bring healing to others we share in the power of Christ

When we are passionate about peace and justice, we share in the passion of Christ

When we work and create we share in the creativity of Christ

When we bring about renewal after destruction we share in the miracle-working of Christ

When we search for truth we share in the wisdom of Christ

When we suffer, we suffer with Christ;

When we die we die with Christ;

Then we are raised with Christ and, like him, we are “caught up into all the glory of God.”

I would like to finish with the poem of Edmund Banyard, from which the title of this sermon was taken. Poem called “Ascension.”

Lost to sight in the clouds! Taking off, jet propelled like a human rocket to return to-where? Is that how it was, the Ascension?

Or.. caught up into all the glory of God and so here-and everywhere; no longer imprisoned by physical limitations; unseen, but not unexperienced.

One with the Father Jesus takes into the Godhead all that it means to be human.

And so I know that I am known by the Almighty. Known and understood.

Amen.