

ASCENSION DAY: MARMITE AND HEAVEN!

PREACHER : Canon Neil Thompson, Precentor

Thursday, May 13th 2010

Ascension Day

8.00pm

Rochester Cathedral

Marmite as a British gastronomic institution has seen a revival over the last few years.

Indeed it has an almost totemic reputation in literary form as a litmus test on people's likes and dislikes. Yes, you either love the stuff or hate it!!

And this year during the General Election campaign it gained some notoriety by being associated with the British National Party's propaganda.

And all because it's slogan, *Love it or hate it* spells out an unequivocal judgement as to people's tastes.

Now, if Jesus was alive today, would he love Marmite or hate it?

This may seem a trivial and almost flippant question but in fact it is part of the detail and the logic of the mystery of God in the incarnation.

In sharing our human life, God has limited himself in our identity, preferences, gifts and foibles: there is no reason to doubt that Jesus would through his taste buds have a view like all of us as to whether he loves or hates Marmite.

Loving and hating is something that we humans do a lot of.
And much of our lives is taken up by our preferences as well as our prejudices.

Choice and opinion are not only a great blessing but because they can be exploited, they can also oppress and diminish the quality of life.

On this great Feast of the Ascension, the fortieth day of Easter, we are challenged as to how we are set free by the power of the risen life of the incarnate Lord in Jesus.

And being 'set free' addresses all the negatives that prejudice and judgment can bring.

This is something quite different from the images of the Ascension that can so easily fill our minds – of Jesus going up to some location in the skies.

The Ascension is truly about seeing beyond and below and within; seeing over the horizons that our mortal and flawed humanity are subject to.

Only God in Jesus has been perfect and reigns from beyond the dimensions that hold us in being. Jesus and the eternal are one both in and beyond time.

And so the Ascension gives us a picture, an experience, beyond that which we are naturally given, and it speaks of a perspective that can if we are open and welcoming to it, to re-shape our thinking, our loving and our living.

It is expressed in our commitment to those with whom we naturally and preferentially, disagree, dislike and disown.

In these days of our coalition government, there is a certain freshness and relevance as to how this might work for you and me!

It is also Christian Aid Week, and we are further invited to consider our commitment and love for one another beyond the natural and the local that can so easily dominate our sense of giving, care and charity.

So all this comes from that *Marmite* slogan: *Love it or hate it?*

Within all our taste and definite views and preferences, there is always something new and greater.

The Ascension, which invites us to lift up the eyes of our minds and hearts, can help us to pray in a new way so that our prayers not only flow out from our knowledge and our emotions but at the same time the ascended Christ's life can flood into us and bring a new view of the world, our neighbour and ourselves.

So the Jesus of history and the Christ of the resurrection leave the particularity of human history in order to live with all people and all ages through the power and presence of the Spirit.

Today's celebration is about Jesus entering the glory that is above us and beyond us.

Our reading from Daniel speaks of this utterly different realm of God in which God's power eclipses everything that we know and can apprehend.

His (God's) dominion...shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed. (Daniel 7.14)

And God's power is so different from that which we grasp and recognise and respect and often worship.

It isn't glamorous.

Time and time again Jesus teaches us that God's rule is symbolised by the small and seemingly insignificant: the mustard seed, yeast, a grain or two of salt and a little child.

What a contrast with fast cars, smart clothes, big bank balances and large houses: the glory that so many people in our consumer driven society aspire to.

Yes, there is a different sort of power: God's love - and it is the only power that reigns and triumphs over suffering, evil and death. Amidst our world of *Marmite* love and hating, may it find us now and for evermore.

Amen.