

Christ is the Head of All Things

May 13, 2021 Scott Gunn

The fullness of the head is the body and that of the body is the head. Observe how skillfully Paul writes and how he spares no word to express the glory of God. The “fullness” of the head, he says, is fulfilled through the body. The body consists of all its members. He shows Christ using each member individually, not merely all in common. For if we were not many—one a hand, one a foot, one another member—the body would not be full. Through all members, therefore, his body is made full. Then the head is fulfilled, then the body becomes perfect, when we are all combined and gathered into one. — John Chrysostom (c. 347 – 407), Homily on Ephesians

John Chrysostom is writing about verses from Ephesians, part of the assigned epistle reading for the Feast of the Ascension.

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. — Ephesians 1:20-23

It's easy to get lost in the dazzling special effects of Ascension Day and miss the meaning. Sometimes we talk about Pentecost as the birthday of the church, but I wonder if today is a better day to celebrate as the church's beginning. For it is at his ascension that Christ returned to his Father in heaven, blessing and trusting his followers to carry on.

How did Jesus intend for his ministry to continue? He commissioned his church, consisting of many members, with Christ himself as the head. It's quite beautiful, really. The body is not whole without all of us. And we are not whole without Christ as our head.

Imagine what church committee meetings might be like if, instead of advocating for what we want, we made space to ask what Christ our head is asking us to do? What if we looked around our churches and asked who is missing? In other words, in what ways is the body not yet whole? What if we took seriously the fact that Jesus has entrusted us with life-changing, world-shaping work?

Can you think of a time when someone trusted you to do something important? I mean, really trusted you? If so, I bet you did your best to match the trust that had been placed. Jesus has entrusted the church, and he has promised his abiding presence. If we ever doubt that the church can transform lives and change the world, we need only remember that our God raised Jesus from the dead, raised Jesus into heaven, and abides with us today. Let us not be discouraged by earthly struggles, but raised to boundless hope by the power, trust, mercy, and love of God.