

Acts 1:1-11 Acts 1:1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with {5 Or in} water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." ⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. ¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

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My nephew Ben had his first birthday a month ago. You folks remember praying for Benjamin. He was born with two holes in his heart and to get Sick Kids to fix it was a bit of an ordeal. He's fixed now and to see him you'd never know there was a problem. But I digress. At his Birthday Party and just before lunch my sister-in-law Meghan pulls out a little craft thing that our other nephew Jake made in Sunday School that morning. I've made a copy of it. As you can see it is a white Styrofoam cup with cotton ball clouds glued to it turned upside-down with a string running through it. On the end of the string is a paper Jesus which you can raise up and down into the cup making it appear that Jesus is disappearing. The craft was meant to help teach them about Jesus' ascension. Meghan said that all the way home from church that morning Jake sat enthroned upon his car seat making Jesus disappear into the cup. Jake would pull the string, Jesus would disappear and the Jake would say, “scension.” Jake was born six weeks premature and like most preemies his speech is a bit delayed and for him to be able to tackle a word like “scension” is something to cheer about.

I am not an expert on preschool education, but I thought the cup idea was a neat way of trying to teach a child about Jesus' whereabouts. If we tell them he's alive I'm sure they will wonder where he's at and why they can't see him. The answer to that question then goes, “he's behind the clouds and inside the cup and he can go in and out of the cup for us to see him whenever he wants and one day he's going to come out for good and we'll be able to see inside the cup where he was. So, be watching. Always look up and be watching because

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it's going to be really good when he comes back.” That cup craft is just brilliant. Any three year old can understand Jesus ascension that he's here but just somewhere where we can't see him and one day he's coming back. I bet somebody out there's thinking to themselves, “and I hope he doesn't see his shadow when he does.” I was thinking that.

Well, Jesus' Ascension is little more complicated than just saying, he's here, but we can't see him and one day he will appear for good. For one thing, to celebrate Jesus' ascension is to celebrate his enthronement as the LORD, the Lord who has saved his creation having defeated evil, sin, and death through his incarnation and faithfulness in life and his death and resurrection. But, and to be frank, saying that Jesus is LORD over all creation is a bit of a hard sell these days. It's been just shy of 2,000 years. The world is still full of evil. The pandemic of sin is still raging. Death is still the leading cause of death. What's changed? Really, what has changed since Jesus was enthroned as LORD of all creation? One could easily argue that Science and Technology have done way more good than him. You could even add that religion, all religion, that great “opiate of the masses” has caused more death and suffering than any disease ever has and continues to do so. How can we talk about Jesus reigning as LORD over all creation when reality is so “obviously” contradictory with it's facts?

One thing we do not do is play that old faith card. Where we say that faith and reality are two different things. You just have to have faith. Yet, true faith is not divorced from reality. If we are going to say Jesus is LORD and that he is ultimately reigning then we somehow have to work in there that yes, its been 2,000 years; yes, evil, sin, and death are still around; and yes, those who claim to believe in him have done some pretty heinous things. Indeed, to be faithful to faith when we go looking for the reign of Jesus we have to go right smack-dab into the heart of all the brokenness and human insidiousness and there we will find it both his reign and true faith.

Just before Jesus ascended his disciples asked him basically was right now the time he was going to set things to right. Instead of making his victory overtly manifest by putting the world to rights, he told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the gift the Father had promised them, the Holy Spirit who would empower them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. In classic Jesus' fashion his reign, his Lordship, indeed he himself for now will only be manifest through weakness not strength. His power becomes manifest through the futility of prayers and acts of humble service by those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. His Lordship is attested by small gatherings of individuals who have been changed at heart by God's presence in them. Let me give you an example. This is an account of a day in the life of an Emerge nurse, Dawn Husnick, that I think speaks loudly to how Jesus is LORD:

“In my years in the ER, I saw Jesus daily doing his kingdom work in and through a group of his followers. It was a true expression of church. One day stands out beyond all others and left me radically changed forever. It was the day I saw Jesus face to face...

'Give us hearts as servants' was the song they were singing as I left the church service, heading for my second twelve hour shift in a row. Weekends in

the ER can be absolutely brutal! I was physically and emotionally spent as I walked up to the employee entrance. The sound of ambulances and an approaching medical helicopter were telltale signs that I would literally be hitting the ground running.

'Dawn...can you lock down room 15?' yelled out my charge nurse as I crawled up to the nurse's station. (When someone asked for a lockdown it was usually a psychiatric or combative case.) Two security guards stood outside the room, biceps flexing like bouncers anticipating a drunken brawl. My eyes rolled as I walked past them into the room to set up.

The masked medics arrived with N strapped and restrained to their cart. The hallway cleared with heads turned away in disgust at the smell surrounding them. They entered the room and I could see N with his feet hung over the edge of the cart covered with plastic bags tightly taped around the ankles. The ER doctor quickly examined N while we settled him in. The medics rattled off their findings in the background with N mumbling in harmony right along with them. The smell was overpowering as they uncovered his swollen, mold-encrusted feet. After tucking him in and taking his vital signs, I left the room to tend to my other ten patients-in-waiting.

Returning to the nurse's station, I overheard the other nurses and techs arguing over who would take N as their patient. In addition to the usual lab work and tests, the doctor had ordered a shower complete with betadine foot scrub, antibiotic ointment, and non-adherent wraps. The charge nurse looked in my direction. 'Dawn, will you please take N? Please? You don't have to do the foot scrub—just give him a shower.' I agreed and made my way to gather the supplies and waited for the security guard to open up the hazmat shower.

As I waited with N, the numbness of my business was interrupted by an overwhelming sadness. I watched N, restless and mumbling incoherently to himself through his scruff of a beard and 'stache. His eyes were hidden behind his ratted, curly, shoulder-length mane. This poor shell of a man had no one to love him. I wondered about his past and what happened to bring him to this hopeless empty place? No one in the ER that day really looked at him and no one wanted to touch him. They wanted to ignore him and his broken life. But as much as I tried...I could not. I was drawn to him.

The smirking security guards helped me walk him to the shower. As we entered the shower room I set out the shampoo, soaps, and towels like it was a five-star hotel. I felt in my heart that for at least for those ten minutes, this forgotten man would be treated as a king. I thought for those ten minutes he would see the love of Jesus. I set down the foot sponge and decided that I would do the betadine foot scrub by myself as soon as his shower was finished. I called the stock room for two large basins and a chair.

When N was finished in the shower I pulled back the curtain and walked him to the 'throne' of warmed blankets and the two basins set on the floor. As I knelt at his feet, my heart broke and stomach turned as I gently picked up his swollen rotted feet. Most of his nails were black and curled over the top of his toes. The skin was rough, broken, and oozing pus. Tears streamed down my

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face while my gloved hands tenderly sponged the brown soap over his wounded feet.

The room was quiet as the once-mocking security guards started to help by handing me towels. As I patted the foot dry, I looked up and for the first time N's eyes looked into mine. For that moment he was alert, aware, and weeping as he quietly said, 'Thank you.' In that moment, I was the one seeing Jesus. He was there all along, right where he said he would be.

'...Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"¹ Friends, for now it is in the prayers and little acts of love insignificant people of transformed heart do for other insignificant people that Jesus is attested as LORD. Friends, our God reigns and you are part of it. Never underestimate what is going on when you feel moved in your very bowels to show kindness to someone. Amen.

¹ McKnight, Scot; [A Community Called Atonement](#); Abington Press, Nashville, 2007; p. 3.