

27th July 2025, Reflection – The Creed (7): ‘...ascended and seated at Father’s right hand’

It’s the end of the first century AD. An old saint sits in exile on a remote island. He’s lived a long and remarkable life, and is one of the only people left alive who actually knew Jesus personally – more than that, was friends with him. He’s seen extraordinary things, and done plenty of them as well. But times are hard now. The church is facing pressures like never before. Followers of Jesus are facing death, persecution, the world seems to be going to hell in a handcart. Secular power gets ever more corrupt.... And, despite all that, Jesus didn’t return in their generation, like so many of them thought.

This old saint will never renounce his faith – but he wonders. Did he really understand it right? He spent his life as a church leader talking about love – now he talks about ‘the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Christ.’ It’s a grittier message – but he still prays, he still seeks the presence of Jesus by his Spirit, the Advocate and Encourager he once wrote about.

And then he sees something: a vision – of the present, of the future, but most of all, of a *person*. 60 or more years after Jesus ascended to heaven on a hill just outside Jerusalem, he sees his Lord once again. But this Jesus is very different. His appearance is beyond words, but some hours later, exhausted and euphoric, he tries to capture it like this (Revelation 1:12b-16):

‘I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.’

I wonder, if you had been this old saint, what you would have done? Just what the old saint did, I imagine: (v17) ‘When I saw him, I fell at his feet, as though dead.’ This Jesus was so glorious, so magnificent, so majestic and powerful, all he can do is prostrate himself in wonder. But this Jesus is still Jesus: ‘Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid.”’ Later the old saint sees that the nail marks are still there – again, this is still Jesus – but Jesus now ascended and seated at the right hand of the Father.

Today, we continue our series on the Creed; and, crucially, as we look at this line in the Creed today – **this is who Jesus still is**. Yes, we want to picture Jesus on the cross, to remember his humanity, what he suffered, despised and rejected, for our sake. We need to do that. But we also need to look at this Jesus, as best we can in his glorious light: the ascended Jesus is the one who reigns now for all eternity.

This is who Jesus has always been. The bible makes that clear – and it also makes it all the more remarkable that all this glory, all this majestic power was crammed into a human body, for our sake, to carry out God’s rescue plan for all humanity. The great Christian writer C.S. Lewis once commented that if you want to know what it was like for the Son of God to become human, then imagine what it would be like for you to become a slug. (No offence to slugs, obviously.)

On earth Jesus gave us numerous glimpses of his eternal nature – all the miracles, walking on water, at his baptism, on the mountain transfigured, to the terror of his closest friends. And yet this old saint – St John, by the way – also recorded that the moment of his greatest glory, as judged by Jesus himself, was on the cross. The greatest act of majesty was the greatest act of self-sacrifice of them all. That is what true divine self-giving majesty looks like. Hallelujah.

But, once that was achieved, once Jesus had risen in power from the dead, then it was only right that his true nature should be revealed again more gloriously. Jesus returned to heaven, and is now with the Father for evermore. And it is this Jesus that old John sees, the eternal Jesus, what some traditions call the cosmic Jesus, the one who fills the whole universe and whom we worship with awe and wonder.

What about that phrase: God's right hand? In ancient thought and practice, the right hand was the source of power (with apologies to all left-handed people – I can reassure you that in the early church people laid *both* hands on others as a sign of blessing!). It follows therefore that the one who exercised the power of a monarch sat at their right hand in the court. The person who sat at the right hand wields the power and authority of the monarch. So, when the Creed declares that Jesus sits at the Father's right hand – and that applies now, and for all eternity – it means that **Jesus is the one who now exercises all of God's power and authority in the world**, in the universe, you could say. It is Jesus who fulfils Daniel's famous vision of the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand, which Jesus testified to at his trial, and which got him killed – as we heard in our gospel reading.

But if we go to our other reading, knowing that Jesus exercises all of God's power and authority now has three vital implications – and this is where it gets real for us today: **first, Jesus exercises that power and authority in our lives**. St Paul invites us (in vv18-19) to pray for hope, riches and power – and isn't it interesting that he takes ideas that most people want for their lives, but turns them upside down, *transforms* them into the true desires we were always meant to have: the *hope* to which we are called, i.e. a real eternal purpose in life; the *riches* of God's spiritual blessings given to his followers; and his *power* to intervene in our lives – and the fact that the example he uses is of Christ's resurrection makes it clear that this power is about bringing us true life, transforming us into the people we were called to be.

Second, Jesus exercises that power and authority for his Church. That's how Paul concludes this section, isn't it: Jesus is 'head over everything *for the Church*'. Why? Because it's his body – and look how Paul describes the Church: 'the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.' The Church is designed to display the fullness of Christ. If I can put it plainly, what it means is that when people come to church, they should leave feeling full. Full of love, full of hope, full of grace for the week ahead. Full of Jesus, basically. Now there's a prayer to pray for our church!

Finally, Jesus exercises that power and authority over the whole earth. The ascended Jesus is now far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and Paul declares that God 'placed all things under his feet.' This gives us hope to keep praying for all the troubles of our broken world. But let's not misunderstand how Jesus exercises his authority. Yes, he can and does intervene miraculously – but we worship a Saviour who became flesh, and who now gives his fullness *to the Church*. In other words, most of the time, Jesus answers prayers through people. Wars don't just end – they need people of peace on both sides to intervene and make them end. People aren't just fed out of thin air, they need people to give them food. Jesus gives us, his Church, the authority to go and change the world, in his name and for his glory.

What of the things we feel powerless to change or help? Then we pray: how long, O Lord? We pray for Jesus to change the hearts and minds of people that can make a difference. But rather than just despair of all the things we can't change, can I suggest that ultimately our best response is to live and act in hope for the little bit of the world that we can change. A woman once walked along the beach and saw it was covered in millions of starfish. As she walked, she saw a little girl at the shore, walking up the sand, picking up one starfish at a time and throwing it into the sea. The woman went up to the girl and said: 'what are you doing? Look at all the millions of starfish – how can you make a difference on this beach?' The little girl looked at the woman, then picked up another starfish. She walked to the shoreline and threw it into the sea. 'Well, it made a difference to that one,' she said.

As I close, this line of the Creed is one of the least well-known and most overlooked. But **how we need it! We need it because it reminds us that we worship a great big God**. It invites us to hold onto a vision of Jesus that is big enough to change our lives and change our world. It gives us faith to pray and inspiration to act – because Jesus sits forever at God's right hand, exercising all that majesty, power and glory for the Church. Let's recapture that vision today. I believe in Jesus, who ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. Amen.