



As a seminary teacher, I would ask this question of students in a New Testament introduction class, “True or false, the humanity of Jesus continues after the Ascension.” The answer would invariably be predominately “False.” Jesus was no longer human after the Ascension. How did you answer?

We worship Jesus, we pray through Jesus, and we name Jesus as the second person of the Trinity. Those practices, valid though they certainly are, can have the effect of “pedastalizing” Jesus (a term borrowed from Jesuit theologian John Haughey) and tinting our reading of the Gospels. We can lose touch with the real humanity of Jesus in the Gospel accounts. Jesus was moved with compassion for the sick and oppressed (Mark 1:41). He felt anger toward those lacking such compassion (Mark 3:5). He wept publicly at the death of a close friend (John 11:33-35), and he felt dread and fear at the prospect of his death (Mark 14:33-34).

That “pedastalizing” applies not only to our reading of the Gospels but also to our present understanding of Jesus’ existence beyond the Ascension. According to the writer of Hebrews, Jesus continues to be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15-16). Having suffered every kind of temptation and testing, Jesus can feel with us in our struggles. Earlier in the letter, the writer maintains that Jesus’ earthly life and its trials and sufferings equip him now to help us when we are tested (Hebrews 2:10-18, esp. v. 18). Hebrews 5 probably describes Jesus’ experience in the Garden the night of his arrest. The writer says Jesus “learned obedience” through what he suffered and that it equipped him more fully to be our Savior (Hebrews 5:7-9).

So, I answer my question with “true.” Jesus’ humanity continues after the Ascension. He shares in the travails of our human experience and feels what we feel. He has taken our human experience into the Triune Deity in the heavenly places. We are never alone and misunderstood. And, we now are in the presence of the Triune God in heaven through our union with Jesus.

This understanding of Jesus as my loving and empathic older brother (Hebrews 2:11) emboldens me during the Christmas season.

God’s peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David W. Perkins".

David W. Perkins, Interim Rector