



## On your marks

Ascension Day is increasingly overlooked as a festival in the church. Coming ten days before Pentecost it marks an important transition between the earthly life of Christ with his resurrection appearances and the beginning of the work of the Spirit in the people of God as recorded in Acts and on up to the present-day. The fact that Christ ascended back to his Father is referred to a number of times in the Bible as an important reference point for the faith of Christians. For example it means that Christ is now interceding for us there, having taken into the Godhead an understanding of what it means to be human. It also means that he now sits in triumph at the right hand of the Father as head of the church awaiting the final victory of his people on earth. Finally of course it also opens the way for him to send his Holy Spirit on all who believe, as he promised, so they might experience his presence with them in a new invisible way from now until he returns again.

The following presentation tries to pick up on some of these points in a simple way, connecting them to different pairs of shoes!

## Get set

You will need some pairs of shoes as visual aids for this talk. A pair of soccer boots; a pair of slippers; and a pair of sandals. Put these into three shoeboxes, which you can open at the appropriate moments.

## Go!

1 Start with this riddle:

What has a sole but no body? A tongue but no mouth? Needs 'heeling' but there's no wound? Can be any length but is always a foot? And what is it that must always accept de-feet!

A pair of shoes of course. There are millions of shoes in the world and shoe shops on most high streets; from ballet shoes to walking shoes; from high-heeled shoes to Wellington boots; from trainers to babies' booties.

2 Who has had new shoes recently? Amazingly it's often hard to find the right size, style and colour etc despite there being so many to choose from. Just think how many used shoes there must be in the world? How many empty shoes! Empty shoes can sometimes bring back memories too! *Perhaps you can talk about some empty shoes from your own experience that have memories attached!*

3 I don't know whether Jesus left any empty shoes behind when he left his disciples at the Ascension but it made me think. He certainly left an empty place - an emptiness after three years of being together; after the three days of death and resurrection; and after the 40 days of his re-appearings. You'd think that disciples would have been sad but in fact Luke tells us that they weren't. They were full of joy, worshipping and praying and of course waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit, which he had promised them. They must also have thought about what his Ascension meant and maybe some



imaginary empty shoes of Jesus can help us understand what had happened. The empty cross and empty tomb were clear reminders of the facts that Jesus had died and had risen. How might empty shoes help us understand about Jesus' Ascension?

4 There are three pairs of shoes in these three boxes. I wonder how each of them could help us understand why Jesus ascended. Maybe the word 'shoe' itself can be a starting place. The letters of the word could stand for: **Seated High Over Everything!** This is where Jesus is now for us but what does it mean?

5 Open the first box to reveal a pair of soccer boots. Make a comment about how well worn they are and how they may well have been seasoned goalscorers! Maybe even those worn in a final? Maybe on the winning side? Make some reference to current football finals in the news, although be sensitive if a local team has not been successful!

These football boots remind me of a football victory when the winning team goes up to fetch the cup and everyone cheers "we've won", even though the fans themselves haven't ever touched the ball! Jesus at his Ascension goes up to collect the cup from the Easter victory and if we're in his team we too can say 'we've won'. We can share in the joy and excitement of his victory right here on earth, whatever our situation is. The enemy is now under his feet because of what happened at Easter and so we too can 'reign' in our lives knowing that he reigns. These shoes remind me that **Jesus is now the King who reigns.**

6 Open the second box and reveal a pair of slippers. Where do you normally wear slippers? Usually at home when you're relaxing or resting. These remind me that Jesus at his Ascension went home - to heaven. Back to be with his Father, welcomed by angels. And because he is at home we can trust that we too will find a home in heaven with him. How? Because the entry price to heaven has been paid for us at Easter. Jesus paid that price and the marks of the nails are still visible in heaven to prove the price was paid. These shoes remind me that **Jesus is the Rescuer who pays.**

7 Finally open the box with the sandals. These make me think of summer and warm weather. They are also much more like the sort of shoes Jesus would have worn. Shoes in which he walked, taught and healed, as he met with the sadness, loneliness and tiredness of our world; the shoes in which Jesus lived his earthy life. It was a life like yours and mine that experienced the same temptations and difficulties. The Ascension tells me that Jesus took all this experience into heaven. He can understand me and can talk to the Father directly, with real feeling for my situation. He prays for me. He's talking about you and me in heaven now. These shoes remind me that **Jesus is the Friend who prays.**

8 These three pairs of shoes may help you remember that, though Jesus isn't here now in a way that needs shoes *with an earthly body*, the ascension is still important for us. He's now in the place of victory and shares it with us. *He has played for us and won.* He's now at home and is preparing a place for us. *He has paid for us to go in.* He's also at prayer - speaking about us with understanding. *He prays for us to win*



9 Jesus has been in our shoes on earth so that one day we can be in his shoes in heaven. This is the truth of the Ascension. And there is at least one other thought too. Jesus wore our shoes on earth. He now wants to go on walking in our shoes through the Holy Spirit, whose coming we celebrate. Ours will be the feet, which he uses to go on walking this earth to heal and transform this world. The truth of the Ascension is so important for us. Jesus reigns. Jesus has paid the price of entry into heaven. Jesus prays for us this coming week and always.