

Sermon for Evening Prayer Ascension Day. 21.5.20 - Acts1:1-11 & Luke 24:44-53

*Lord Jesus, may your Spirit energise us to open our eyes and our hearts to you and may you give us the words and the courage to tell of your transforming love to those who do not yet know or believe in you. Amen*

**Ascension Day** - the day when the risen Jesus returned in glory to his home in heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father, the creator of all things - a day to celebrate..... but spare a thought for those first disciples of Jesus:

- The roller coaster for them continued - Easter - death and resurrection -then meeting the risen Christ numerous times - getting used to that, and now, 40 days after that miraculous conquering of death- Jesus disappears into the clouds!
- Having convinced his disciples of his real and risen presence, albeit different from his body before death, he now asks them to wait for the appearance of the 3rd member of the Trinity - the Holy Spirit- to come into their lives.
- I wonder why he told them they had to wait several days?
- Couldn't Jesus have made things a little easier for his confused, long-suffering disciples and just done a straight swap - I'm going back to heaven now but here's my Holy Spirit which I assure you will be with you for ever .....
- Perhaps it was to emphasize the importance of waiting for God's timing -
- and more importantly during this waiting, to prepare for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the momentous task of evangelism that had been set before them
- *Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*
- But what I love about the reaction of the disciples to this directive was their joy and eager anticipation *Luke 24:52 And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: 53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God.*
- This is in contrast to the utter dejection that they had felt when Jesus had left them the first time - being put to death on a cross, upsetting all their hopes they had had in Jesus to be a new king to overthrow the Romans and bring them freedom.
- So Jesus had convinced them he had risen, that he could overcome death, that a new beginning was possible with God because of the forgiveness of their sins..... that they could find immense peace and joy and fulfilment by believing and following him:
- *Luke24:45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures 46 and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem*
- And so the disciples spent the days until the Holy Spirit came, by spending all their time closely connecting to their marvellous living God who had until very recently been among them in such a powerful way in the form of Jesus Christ.
- Imagine them worshipping, praying, praising, thanking God, encouraging and supporting each other, receiving God's power, his affirmation for the task ahead, his unconditional love, believing in Jesus's reassurance that he would be with them always, guiding, comforting, encouraging and leading them forward on their journeys.
- And that can be just the same for each of us this Ascension Day and the following 10 days until Pentecost
- Let us follow the disciples' lead and really try to put Jesus centre-stage in the next 10 days
- Pray and worship God through Jesus, in whatever way really feeds you: traditional liturgy, prayer alone or with others in your house or on line, coming close to God through the natural world on your daily exercise or just looking at photos of trees, greenness, the sea

or mountains, but don't be afraid to try something new as well - there are many resources and ideas from the Church of England's global prayer movement Thy Kingdom Come

- With the current Covid-19 crisis isn't this even more important and won't it be even more powerful in bringing us hope grounded in truth, God's truth which is purely and simply: Love- shown in compassion, understanding, kindness, gentleness, perseverance and trust
- A belief that this crisis *will* end one day and that God will have opened the eyes of all of us in the world and transformed us to take care of each other and all creation in a fairer, more inclusive and gentler way.
- Will you take the challenge and also the embrace offered to you by Jesus, and let him lead you forward to a new wholeness and hope for the future, trusting that he will be with you always whatever you face?
- Amen
  
- K. Nice 21.5.20