

## ASCENSION THOUGHTS IN LOCKDOWN

Ascension Day is an important festival in the church's year, marking the end of Jesus' ministry here on earth, but most importantly ushering in and enabling the next part of God's plan, the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit on all his followers. But it also involves a farewell and a departure. We are all very aware how hard it can be for those left behind. When someone leaves us, to move a long distance away, it is easy to feel a sense of loss and sadness. And particularly at this time we may be deeply aware of the absence of loved ones, family and friends whom we cannot meet. Of course we can talk to them on phone, or perhaps see them on video calls, but somehow it isn't quite the same as being with them.

So Ascension Day's message on the face of it seems to be all about separation, something very familiar to us all at present. Jesus has to leave his close friends in order to return to his Father, and perhaps we would expect it to be a sad occasion. After all, Jesus' disciples had spent three years alongside, witnessing his deeds and absorbing his teaching, so it would be reasonable to suppose they may be feeling rather desolate, but no, Luke tells us that they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy".

As we approach the end of the great season of Passiontide and Easter, perhaps we can see, with the benefit of hindsight that it was all part of God's plan, but Jesus makes it very clear that this plan does not finish here. The Resurrection is to be followed by the proclamation of the Gospel, starting in Jerusalem. And Jesus' ascension is essential to this, as he would be in the position to send the promised gift of Holy Spirit, which would equip the disciples with "power from on high" and embolden them to proclaim the Good news. It is this promise which makes all the difference, the disciples rejoice and head towards Jerusalem with joy. This separation was about joyful anticipation about what is to take place.

For us, we rejoice in the gift of the Holy Spirit too, and we can daily draw on his wisdom, guidance and courage to deal with day to day challenges. But we are still in a sort of "between time" in which many of us are deeply conscious of the sadness of separation from those we love with no real knowledge when this might change. But it is the Holy Spirit that will give us the resources to deal with this, and inspire us on our daily walk.

May the joy of the Risen and ascended Christ be with you and gladden your hearts at this disturbing time.

Alice