**Acts 1:6-14 The Sunday After Ascension 24th May 2020**

The lockdown continues, and in our lectionary reading, we find ourselves thinking about the ascension of Jesus, his physical rising from this world to be seated with the Father in Heaven. The disciples are once again isolated in an upper room, as they had been 40 days earlier when they were greatly distressed after witnessing Jesus’ death.

On that previous occasion, they were locked away in fear and uncertainty until the risen Jesus came to them, proving that he was alive again.

Now, the disciples have a much clearer understanding of what their task is. They certainly do not know all the details, but Jesus has just commissioned them for the work ahead.

Let us read the passage from Acts 1:6-14:

**6**Then they gathered round him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’

**7**He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. **8**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’

**9**After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

**10**They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. **11**‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’

**12**Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. **13**When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. **14**They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (NIVUK)

Jesus has been with them over those 40 days, teaching them and preparing them for what they were to do. They were to be his witnesses throughout the world. It was a daunting task, but they knew that they would have enormous help. Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit and they would be baptised in his power. And they now knew that he could only send the Spirit after he had ascended to sit at the right hand of the Father. With the Spirits help, they would be equipped and guided and blessed in the work that Jesus had called them to do.

The ascension is really important to us as Christians, not only because he could then send the Holy Spirit upon all believers, but as St John recorded in his Gospel, it also means that he has gone ahead to prepare an eternal home for us, in the presence of our heavenly Father. St John recorded this teaching of Jesus in his Gospel.

The ascension also means that Jesus is continually able to pray for us, as St Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Rome.

These aspects of his ascension mean that all believers are assured of their new status as members of God’s family, and we can see our lives in a far wider context than just our physical place here in Pembrokeshire.

We see in the reading that the Disciples are with many others including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and even his four brothers. They had previously thought him mad, but now through the grace of God, believe that their brother is their Lord. And this whole gathering are waiting upon the promised baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Let us jump back a little in our reading to where we find the Disciples having just spoken with Jesus, asking about the future, then watched him ascend to heaven. They are left standing in awe, looking up into the cloud where Jesus vanished from sight. Just then, we have the sudden appearance of two men dressed in white, messengers of God. The disciples are challenged: “Why do you stand here looking into the sky?”

It is as if these two men are saying, ”You have been given your instructions, so now is not the time to delay, get on with your task!”

How did the disciples respond? Did they go straight out to the ends of the earth and start telling everyone all about Jesus?

No! For that was not what Jesus was calling this infant church community to do, just at that moment. Their task was to wait on the Lord, to wait for the blessing of the Holy Spirit to come upon them. You would think that at least some in the group were champing at the bit to just get on with the mission, but that is not what we are told. They returned to Jerusalem and they all joined together in prayer. A stronger sense of their unity of purpose, comes from a more literal translation that says: “with one accord [they] were devoting themselves to prayer”.

This time of preparation in prayer was important for their preparation of what was to come.

One of the big themes that runs through the whole of Luke’s book of Acts, is the continual hand of the Holy Spirit on all that takes place. We are shown that the miracles and prison escapes, the healings and growth in their understanding and where they travel, is constantly directed by God. The disciple’s time of prayer is crucial preparation for their understanding of when and where the Lord is going to work. How He will expand the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth and what their role in that work is to be.

And here in our passage, we sense that the disciples had learnt this lesson of waiting and trusting in the Lord, to bathe all that they were to do in prayer, and to seek the direction and prompting of the Lord.

We find ourselves in an enforced lockdown still, but perhaps this is the time that the Lord is giving us to pray and seek His guidance for the future; to understand how he is calling each of us to act, for our time of communion with Him in prayer to mould our thoughts and desires, so that they are in line with His thoughts and desires for our lives. This can be uncomfortable as it can challenge us in the way we speak and forgive, in how we serve and pray. It even gives us strength and endurance of faith as we face awful situations, but with our attention captured by our ascended Jesus, we learn to trust him more comprehensively each and every day.

Are we going to use this time in preparation for the work that the Lord wants us to do in the times ahead?

Are we going to make sure that we follow the model of the disciples and pray for the Lord to reveal His will and direction for our lives? The Lord is sovereign over our church communities and our lives, so thinking about how we pray into all the aspects of what we do, for ourselves, for our families and even for the choices when buying a car or dreaming about a future holiday, or how to use our money; it is a Christ dependant and God honouring way for us to live.

As a final thought, I was speaking with a senior member of the clergy in our Diocese the other day, and we were talking about past Revivals here in Wales. We were speculating whether the Lord is going to bring another revival to us here in Pembrokeshire. And as the conversation went on, we spoke about the amazing blessings that people have received in revivals. Stories of the most hardened hearts that were set against the Lord and then came to love Him as being more precious to them than life itself. But we also noted a couple of things in that conversation. Firstly, that fervent prayer was almost always a forerunner to the coming of Revival, and secondly, that the Christian communities are used powerfully and extensively during those months and even years of spiritual outpouring. It is hard work, but the Lord prepares and equips us for such times.

Let us reflect on the unity of the disciples and the constant prayer for the Lords hand to be on whatever is ahead, that it may be a guide for us here in Pembrokeshire as we put our trust in Jesus.

May you be blessed and strengthened this day. Amen

Peter