

Thursday 9th May 2024

Ascension Day

Gospel Reading

Luke 24.44-53

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ 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. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’

The Ascension of Jesus

⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³ and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Other Readings: Acts 1.1-11 or Daniel 7.9-14

Psalm 47 or Psalm 93

Ephesians 1.15-23 or

Acts 1.1-11

Homily

If you love a Netflix boxset binge, or a long running series on TV, you’ll be familiar with the ‘Previously on ...’ And then at the end, and we get that in Luke and Acts today too.

And just like in a crime drama, you have unknown characters who are a bit shady and sometimes included to put you off the scent or sometimes, they turn out to be the murderer or a secret goodie. In today’s readings we get the mysterious Men in White again. At the tomb, if you remember, the women had seen two men in dazzling clothes asking them why they were looking for the living among the dead. Here we have two men in white, asking the disciples why do you stand looking up towards heaven?

On both occasions, the disciples are looking for Jesus in the wrong place.

The question is, where are we going to find him?

The disciples have been through a trauma. They are in grief, they are fearful for their lives, they are away from home, in Jerusalem. They are not in a comfortable place neither geographically or psychologically. Things have been disrupted.

What Luke offers us in his Gospel and Acts is the story of how those first followers of Jesus emerged into their new reality and began to come to terms with it and flourish in it. Luke's answer to the question, where will you find Jesus is in the people who follow him. Those first followers received the Holy Spirit, did what Jesus did and preached his message. We find in Acts stories of healings and exorcisms. And people like Peter become eloquent and articulate about their faith. And we get the first glimpses of the disciples gathering together and breaking bread together – an enactment of Jesus' last supper.

When Jesus reappears after the crucifixion, perhaps his disciples are hoping that things are back to normal again now. It's going to be just like it was before. But what Jesus is trying to help them with is coming to terms with the fact that nothing is ever going to be the same. They have been through a life-changing experience. The world has. And Jesus is not going to be there for them in quite the same way.

Tradition is not static. Church is not the one place in a hectic world where you can expect, demand even, that nothing will change and things will be just as they always have been. It is not only an unhealthy aspiration but it is an impossible one. To be alive is to change – to grow. Our families change and grow. We expect that of our children. Our church family has to do the same. It's at times, heart achingly painful. But it is inevitable and a sign of God's life within us.

Jesus returns to heaven. Heaven is wherever God is to be found. And where God is found, as we hear in our reading from Daniel, things are fabulous and beyond our wildest dreams. But God can be found here, God can be found in the most unexpected places. Even in the villages of Lincolnshire.

So, Luke poses the question, where are we going to find the risen and ascended Jesus? Perhaps the question for us is, where are you going to look, do you want to find him because what we can guarantee is that when you find him, nothing can be the same, ever again.

Conversation Questions

1. Where are you going to look for Jesus?
2. If Jesus has gone to be with His father, where do you think you're going?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you?
What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that as we believe your only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ
to have ascended into the heavens,
so we in heart and mind may also ascend
and with him continually dwell;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Risen Christ,
you have raised our human nature to the throne of heaven:
help us to seek and serve you,
that we may join you at the Father's side,
where you reign with the Spirit in glory,
now and for ever.

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