

Ascension Day 2019 His absence
Luke 24:44-53 Acts 1:1-11 Ephesians 1:15-23

40 days ago we were celebrating Easter Day, the day when we wonder and celebrate Jesus being raised from the dead.

In those 40 days Jesus continued teaching about God's Kingdom: He appeared to his disciples and other people and commissioned them to go and spread the message of the Kingdom. And then He was taken from them in a cloud.

We have big celebrations at Easter and lively celebrations at Pentecost. But Ascension Day is celebrated in a much lesser way. Maybe because it is on a Thursday rather than a Sunday. Maybe because it is not a bank holiday in this country. But maybe also because it is a 'Goodbye'. Many of us do not like goodbyes and may even do all we can to avoid them. But Jesus Ascension is a farewell, a goodbye to him.

His Ascension means an absence for his disciples of the day. They no longer have the physical Jesus there to touch and talk to and eat with. And for us, 2000 years later, we do not have the privilege of being able to talk to him eye to eye. He is absent from us physically.

But for Jesus, His Ascension meant a home coming! Our reading in Ephesians says in vs 20 *'God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places'*

The very word Ascension means to ascend. When I was in Bath our neighbouring church was called Ascension Church and it took me a few visits before I realised that it was not my eyesight but the church was actually built to ascend slightly from the back to the front.

2000 years ago people believed that heaven was just literally above the earth. Having just flown home, above those clouds, we see there is beautiful sunny, blue sky above the clouds. Not heaven - sorry to disappoint you! Heaven is not physically or spatially above our earth.

The 2 men in white robes, mentioned in our Acts reading, were probably angels, but whoever they were, they got the message right. *'Why stand looking up... This Jesus has been taken away from you...'* Acts 1:11

It is not the direction of Jesus movement that is important. What is important is that Jesus is now no longer with us here on earth, physically. He is physically absent from us. And His absence is vital. He left us, literally, to finish what He began.

Mum loves watching Mastermind and the well known phrase that Magnus Magnusson started is still used by John Humphreys...*'I have started so I will finish....'* !!

It is not the same for Jesus and us Jesus started and WE have to finish.

Jesus left earth to resume His place back on the throne of God

And we are entrusted with His world and everyone in it.

Jesus has returned home to be seated at the right hand of the Father (Eph 1:20) and we are left with His absence.

Why?

Well.... without His absence maybe we would still be trailing round after him, waiting to be told what to do....

Jesus had given plenty of instruction to His first followers and modelled perfectly to them what to do and yet still they struggled. When we are in the presence of an expert or master we tend to always look to them.

I remember back when I was training to be a teacher. We had had lots of practice in various ways: different classes, different schools, sometimes for a morning, sometimes for a week or so, different subjects. Then came the time for our first block placement of 5 or 6 weeks. Still I was teaching only small groups most of time with the occasional whole class lesson. I had been observed by my tutor etc etc. Then one day I went in to school and the class teacher I was working with was off sick and the head teacher said to me that I was teaching the class for the day. Me! The WHOLE class! for the WHOLE day! All by myself!!! Shock. Panic. But I did it. I had to get on with it and make the most of it. It wasn't perfect by any stretch of the imagination. But we all survived. I think some of the children even learnt something!!! And my tutor wrote in my report something like...'Maybe now Catherine will start to believe in herself as the teacher she undoubtedly is'

In anything for which we have been trained, there comes a time when we have to go solo and put into practice all that we have been taught... as a teacher, or nurse, or doctor, or decorator or driver... remember that first time you drove the car all on your own without an instructor or passenger!

And it was the same for the disciples... Jesus was now absent and they had to go it alone. But unlike our instructors who leave it to us, Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit would come to 'clothe them with power from on high' Luke 24:49

And Jesus, having returned home, was seated at the right hand of God, the place of power, interceding for us as our High Priest and advocate.

Jesus Ascension means that He is now outside of the restrictions of time and place, back home with the Father.

And, although Jesus is physically absent from us, we have His power at work in us so that we may continue with what He began here on earth.

Ascension marks 40 days after we celebrate Jesus rising from the dead and the start of 10 days of waiting until we celebrate Pentecost next Sunday (9th)

Why don't we use these 10 days to look forward with anticipation, to the celebration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Why don't we dedicate these 10 days to prayer and worship and prepare ourselves afresh to continue the work that, in His physical absence, He has left for us to do, knowing that Jesus is now home, seated at the right hand of God the Father, calling us onwards and encouraging us to persevere in the work that He has left for us to do.