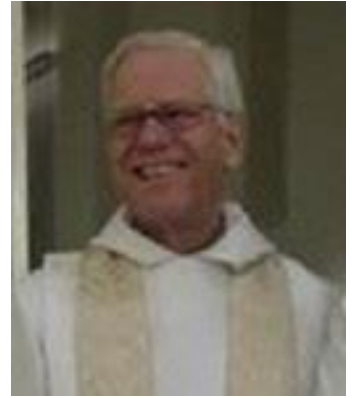


THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

Wednesday 27th May 2020

by The Revd Peter Binns

Associate Priest at St Michael's



During this week between Ascension and Pentecost I'm delighted that Peter has agreed to share with us part of his Ascension Day sermon he originally shared with our friends at St Michaels.

During the lockdown, many people have been separated from family and friends. One of the hardest things has been not being able to see elderly relatives in their own homes or in care homes, being limited to seeing them through the window.

Technology helps, of course, to ease the pain of separation, either by telephone or by video link. I have just discovered that I can receive Zoom on my computer! But, useful as it is, it isn't a substitute for actually being physically with people.

The Ascension is about separation, Jesus leaving his disciples, as he had previously explained to them, and going to be with his Father in heaven.

The disciples, however, will need help. Witnessing will not occur at once; they must stay in the city until they receive power from on high. This will take place at Pentecost. The Spirit will dwell in them, making it possible for them to grow and develop, to learn much more and so to be able to carry out the work, which Jesus has asked them to do. Now it is clear why the events of Jesus' death and resurrection take place near Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the traditional centre of the Messiah, here the prophets are executed, here Christ is raised, and here he establishes his mission to the world, and here the church will begin.

So, as John's Gospel puts it, it is to the disciples' advantage that he go away. The Spirit will dwell in them, making it possible for them to do greater things.

When we leave school or when we are promoted to a new job, we grow and develop. We flourish with new responsibility and learn even more. When pupils reach age 18, as a teacher you may think that you have taught them all you can. You haven't, of course, but they need to move on, to find a new environment, learn in a different way. A change of context helps us to

develop. So, in his farewell discourse in John's Gospel, Jesus says to the disciples:

'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.' This may explain why the disciples are portrayed as being full of joy. Now they have been given responsibility, a new world is open to them, and they can now look forward with confidence.

The disciples' joy shows that, far from being distant, Christ continues to care for us; he is actively still present with us. He is no longer constrained by the limitations of his physical body, but now he lives within us and is there to support and strengthen us. So the disciples, after an uncertain start, are transformed and turned into leaders. That transforming spirit comes to us, too. People are motivated, some become leaders; there is a fresh start and renewed hope. Are we seeing this during the corona virus crisis, as was seen during the Second World War, people joining together to make a difference and to encourage others? Out of a difficult situation has come new strength, working together, supporting one another, perhaps a different view of what really matters in life.

So we can share the disciples' joy at the Ascension. Jesus is with us for ever, and nothing can separate us from his presence. In this way he fulfils Psalm 93:

'The Lord is king and has put on glorious apparel;
the Lord has put on his glory and girded himself with strength.
He has made the whole world so sure that it cannot be moved.
Your throne has been established from of old; you are from everlasting.'

In our present crisis, that is the greatest hope.