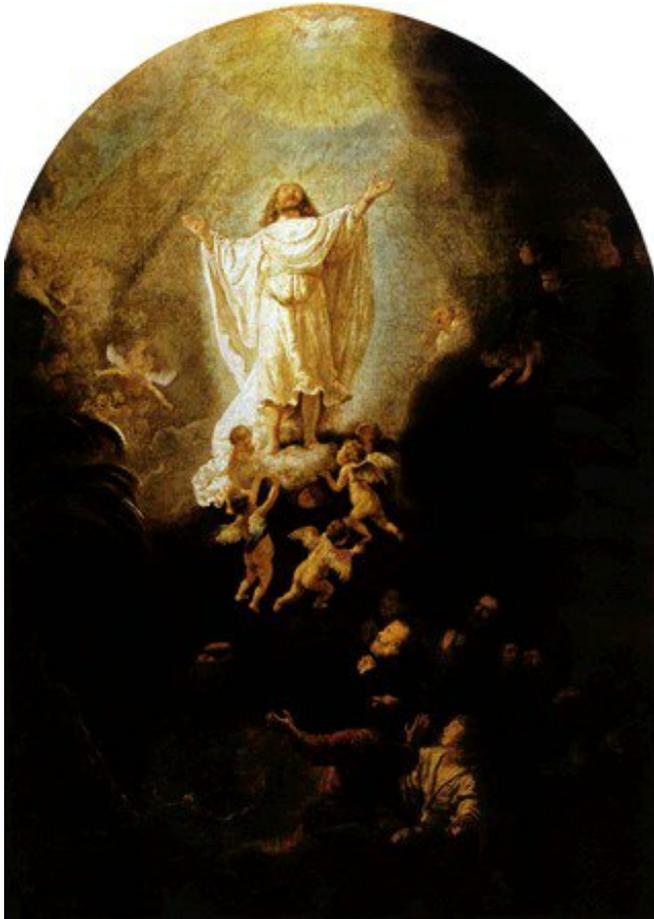


"Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Acts 1:11-12, NIV

*(All Bible references are from NIV translation)*



It is a time of change and transition for the disciples. It has been an incredible past 6 weeks. The dramatic noisy celebration entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday; the painful events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, one of their number betrayed Jesus , other ran away, one of their core people you could say, Peter, had denied him. And when they thought it was all over. He was raised!

Over the following 40 days things were similar but different. Jesus taught them, including about the topic of the kingdom of God. However, Jesus made 11 recorded appearances among them - in Jerusalem, in Galille, and nearby like here at Bethany. He continued to teach them and gave instructions. But at times he was absent. They now gather and they experience another set of emotions.

He ascends. The angels tell them. 'He has gone'. Not gone forever which would have been the pain of Good Friday and pain of confusion. But gone to heaven. Absent. Separated from them.

I remember when I went to university in England. A four year degree. I'd been away from home many times for a week or two or more. But I remember my Mum - maybe it is the Mums who do this - with tears in her eyes as they drove off to begin the long car journey back to N.Ireland. Maybe it was tears of joy but I think perhaps not! That emotion we recognise.

Now on Maundy Thursday - Jesus said:

"Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me :  
"Where are you going? " Because I have said these things you are filled with grief. It is for your good that I am going away."  
(John 16:5-7).

Grief. Upset. Sad. Those were the feelings expressed at Jesus leaving them. They did not still understand about the cross. This is grief at Jesus simply leaving them.

Now what are the emotions Luke - who believes in Eye witness accounts, who carefully investigated things as he shares at the start of his gospel, (see Luke 1:1-4). What emotions were there as they walked down from the Mt of Olives back into the city.

"They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They stayed continually at the temple, praising God." (Luke 24:52-53).

Tears of Joy you could say. Why, when for some their best friend, the one they had faithfully followed the past 3 years, the one who had been dead but was alive again, was now gone?

Two reasons, to focus upon.

First. Confirmation.

Is the ascension yet another perhaps the final **confirmation** for some of who Jesus is? Acts 1:9 -

"he taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight." The cloud. This is, as many scholars believe, more than a meteorological event.

In the scriptures they knew so well, at times cloud enwrapped the glory of God. The cloud which had rest about the Tabernacle -

"the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all Israel" (Exodus 40:38).

After its dedication, the cloud which filled the temple of the Lord,

"the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud for the glory of the Lord filled his temple." (1 Kings 8:10-11).

A cloud was sign of the heavenly glory.

This is not the first time, especially James, John and Peter, remembered such a cloud and Jesus being enveloped in a cloud. During the Transfiguration on Mt Hermon, (Luke 9:28-36). When they talked with Jesus, a cloud appeared, enveloped them, and they heard the voice of the Father - "this my son, whom I have chosen, listen to him." After the voice had finished, the cloud disappeared and they were left with Jesus.

Cloud at his transfiguration, and here again Jesus is enveloped in a cloud. Into Divine presence and Glory. And, the cloud also may have connected in their minds with Daniel 7. As Daniel saw, 'the Son of Man, coming with clouds of heaven' - and this Son of Man was given

"authority, glory, sovereign power, all peoples, nations and people of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:14)

Jesus who called himself the Son of Man and now is taken up into a cloud. And with the clouds he would return - his parousia.

As the angels had said Jesus would return "in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

So the way he ascends. It confirms he enters the Lords's presence. They are not to wait til the cloud goes - like on the Transfiguration - and then he will be with them once again. Rather he has taken up, his residence in heaven at the right hand of the Father. And the cloud may have connected Jesus with Daniel 7 where he is given authority, dominion, glory and power and all nations worshipped. The worship Jesus as they return to Jerusalem, that this event,like others was confirming to them that he was not just their teacher, saviour lord but also their God.

So they return to Jerusalem, with **confirmation** again in who they know Jesus to be.

The second reason.

"It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go I will send him to you." (John 16:7).

He had promised the gift. He would sent them what his Father had promised. They would be clothed with power from him, (Luke 24:49). On Pentecost Peter sees this confirmed: he tells the crowds,

"exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father, the promised Holy Spirit and poured out what you now see and hear." (Acts 2:33)

The disciples go back, from Bethany to Jerusalem, they worship, they praise, they have joy, at the promise to come. He has ascended and he will pour the gift out on them. I was thinking.

Was their joy because they were looking forward to receive the Spirit? This asks me. 'Am I joyful at having the Spirit of God within me?' Remember what Peter promised:

"Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far all..." (Acts 2:38-39). Each of us as Christians has the Spirit of God within us.

As I thought about this. Is our joy affected by how we see Him, the Holy Spirit?

Thinking on a human level. You know if I have someone staying with me, and it is going to be lots of hard work and tiring, my levels of joy may not be too much.

Or there is someone staying with me and I don't know what to do with them. A story from years ago in my training. I was asked to collect a Church of England Bishop from the train station and take him to his room in our college. I did so. Now I didn't know how to act around Bishops, these senior figures, and I remember taking him to his room, and I didn't know what to do next. Do you leave him. Stay with him. Talk to him? And so I left! I did feel really uncomfortable. And I ask told the staff he was there. And I remember asking the office staff - what do you do with a bishop?!! I guess it is hard to be excited or joyful if we don't think it is that particularly exciting having someone there.

Perhaps to swap positions. Again think of those wonderful moments you have all been excited about giving a loved one a gift and to be honest they did not receive it as excitedly as you hoped! Been there. And done it to my kids. Can that be our response to the Spirit like the one who doesn't receive a wonderful gift.

This is a theory. Jesus says it is for their good he goes away. So it is a good gift that comes to them. And think, it is the presence of God coming to live within us. And consider, when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, how the angels sang. When the Spirit came to live in believers, how did heaven react?

So we can be affected by how we see the Holy Spirit. Why is He there - maybe we really don't have a clear idea? Or we think, it is about lots of hard work as He wants to change me? So how do we feel about the Holy Spirit living within us?

What could have been in Peter and the others minds. Well they had seen Jesus minister in the power of the Spirit, so they may have been joyful simply that as Jesus had commissioned them, he would empower them. They saw lives healed, people restored to community, people being transformed. Such as the woman with internal bleeding for 12 years, and she is healed, restored. Or were their minds were soaked in OT images. The Spirit who brings order of chaos, who brings creation in Genesis 1 - the Spirit who could bring creation, order into lives, as Jesus had shown as he announced and demonstrated the kingdom. The Spirit who gave creativity and ability to Bezalel (Exodus 35:30-35), to make the items of the tabernacle, the Spirit who came upon Gideon and Samson, men who by no means were perfect or confident, for leadership and strength, the Spirit who was upon the prophets to speak for God. Can the joy have

flowed and praise, because people like them would receive the Spirit of the OT, previously only given to a few people at specific times.

And it could have been, joy because they knew the Day of the Lord would come, they would enter the last days with the outpouring of the Spirit, as Peter quotes Joel 2, in the last days I will pour out my Spirit. They knew with that outpouring, the day would be so much nearer, the countdown beginning, for God to come and be King, for his reign and rule to come in his fullness.

So, connecting to life. All Saints becomes separate on Sunday. A distinct chaplaincy within the Diocese of Europe. A transition time. A new chapter or volume begins. The disciples could have wandered back, and thought -what next, we are on our own. Yet they go back in worship, praise, eyes fixed upon the Lord for the coming days. Their horizon expanded, faith confirmed, renewed, enlarged. Similarly we can pray that in the weeks ahead, our horizon would be expanded, renewed enlarged. We fix our minds upon heavenly places, heavenly things upon the Lord, than on what faces us on earth.

Secondly. This day is yet another reminder. As we move ahead as a church, we take very seriously Jesus command to WAIT. As people in All Saints the Words of Jesus to Keep watch for his return mean greatly. But these words WAIT - stay in the city - are equally key. They point to the need in all our work ahead - worship, discipleship, prayer, community life, evangelism, service of those outside these walls - all to be done equipped empowered and led by the Spirit.

But that brings us to JOY. The plan of Jesus and his father, another counsellor to be sent to us. He is with us. Joy. We do not

struggle along. We do not hope that he will give us what we need. We know the plan is to give the Spirit and to give all of Him that we need for the tasks. Lord we will have all we need from you for what He calls us to. As the missionary Hudson Taylor wrote: "God's work, done in God's way will never lack God's resources."

These next ten days are being used by the Church of England as days of prayer for the Spirit to renew and refresh the church and us.

Pray for your own personal renewal. Where we feel not too bothered about the Spirit within us, take time to meditate on these verses and others and invite the Spirit to bring joy within us for who he is.

Prayer to close.

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father,  
ignite in us your holy fire;  
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,  
revive your Church with the breath of love,  
and renew the face of the earth,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.