

# A Message from Godfrey

Today we celebrate that moment when Jesus physically departed from his apostles, and for them it was a bereavement. Of course, he'd warned them that he was to go, but like any one of us, even if we know that parting is coming, it doesn't make it any easier when it actually takes place. Our reading from the Acts of the Apostles describes the moment when Jesus was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

The Ascension certainly seems to have reassured the apostles. Afterwards, they went out to the whole world and preached everywhere, confident that the Lord was still with them, despite his physical departure. Jesus promised the apostles, and us, that he would be with us always and that he would send the Holy Spirit to witness to the truth. When our loved ones pass away, when they are taken to be with God in heaven, we know that through Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension into heaven we are with them always. Jesus' human body may be in heaven, but there is a sense in which his body continues here, and that is the body of Christ. That is his church – you and me – we make up the body of Christ. We make Jesus present in our communion together and the Holy Spirit resides, lives, dwells within us.

Let us not forget today, as we are caught up in the middle of this pandemic, that even the disciples themselves were experiencing the normal human emotions that we all go through and that many are going through particularly at this time, as loved ones are dying and as families cannot freely gather as they normally would for funeral services.

These days we tend not to think of the forty day journey from Easter but rather the fifty day journey from Easter, which leads us to Pentecost, and it is this period between Ascension and Pentecost that the church throughout the world is focusing on at the moment with the prayer initiative Thy Kingdom Come. During that initiative, we are invited to think of five people who we would love to see come to faith in Jesus Christ. Who might you be praying for today? Who might you pray for during this ten-day period? Consider carefully how you can use this time and so grow in your prayer life and, indeed, in bringing others to know and love the Lord Jesus.

There has been some discussion recently about whether the words at the end of the eucharist service should be changed. Not so much “go in peace to love and serve the Lord”, but “stay at home in peace to love and serve the Lord”, or, perhaps, “stay alert in peace to love and serve the Lord”. What does it look like for us at the moment to be a church looking outwards? We come to church Sunday by Sunday in order to be sent out – sent out into the world to praise the Lord and to serve his people.

So, what does the Ascension say to us, what do we take from this ‘outward looking’ festival when we are staying safely at home? It recognises that Jesus has completed his work on earth, he was going to the Father where he would sit at the Father’s right hand, reigning over the whole world as Lord and King. And we know from John’s Gospel that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for each one of us. Our hope. Our destiny and even with restrictions lifting again tomorrow we need more than ever to be able to speak of the Good News of Jesus and the promise of eternal life.

That is, we, like those apostles, can be sent out in the power of the spirit, to live and work to God’s praise and glory. As we celebrate the Ascension season as we remember Jesus leaving this world and going to his Father, let us remember that that is also our ultimate destiny to be with God in heaven. With angels, with archangels, and with all the company of heaven, as we say at every Eucharist.

And so today, as we give thanks today for the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, the completion of his work on earth, as we give thanks for the command he gave to the apostles and the command he gives to you and me today to go out to the whole world and proclaim the good news, let us rejoice in this faith. Let us rejoice that we too, one day, will be called to be with God in heaven.

Amen.