

## Ascension

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O God, the king of glory,  
you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ  
with great triumph to your kingdom of heaven:  
we beseech you to leave us not comfortless,  
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us  
and exalt us to the place  
where our Saviour Christ is gone before.

Our text may be found in today's reading from Acts chapter 1 and verse 22:

‘ . . . the day when he was taken up from us . . . ’

Thursday was Ascension Day; today, the Seventh Sunday of Easter, is also the Sunday after Ascension Day so, this morning, let's turn our attention once again to the Ascension.

It must be hard to say goodbye to someone you love. The first time Jesus was snatched from them, the disciples didn't have chance to say goodbye. They may have known, they may have guessed that something bad was just about to happen but the arrest of Jesus in the middle of the night in the Garden of Gethsemane must have been a shock. At the foot of the cross, only John and some of the women were there to see him die.

The second time he left them, they were all watching as Jesus 'was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight'. The account in the first chapter of Acts makes no mention of them saying goodbye, whether they had chance to hug Jesus, to kiss him before he was taken from them.

But what I find interesting is what Luke writes at the end of his gospel: that the disciples returned to Jerusalem 'with great joy' (24 v52). So my question is why? If the man they loved has left them for good, why aren't they understandably upset? And the answer may be found in what Matthew writes at the end of his gospel 'And remember I am with you always' (28 v20).

Perhaps the reason why there is no goodbye recorded in Matthew or Luke is because there is no need to say goodbye if he is still going to be with them.

So let me ask a final question – how? In what sense is Jesus with them, with us, as Matthew tells us he is? And the answer is to be found in what we will hear next Sunday, on the Day of Pentecost. And it is simply the fact of the Holy Spirit's presence in all our lives. We are not alone because Jesus is with us through the presence of the Holy Spirit being in us, alongside us, inspiring and encouraging us, enthusing and informing us, helping us to be the people of God, to be real Christians who reflect the love and light of Christ to those we meet.

So let me leave you with this curious thought: that there was no need for the disciples to say goodbye to Jesus when he ascended into heaven because in reality he never left them. Okay, his physical body was not literally with them, alongside

them, but his spirit was and it is the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives that means we never have to say goodbye to his saving presence with us.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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G: Sermons 31 : Ascension

