



On this final Sunday in our post Easter journey we have an immensely powerful set of readings.

In the Acts reading and in John's gospel we hear of the events of that first Ascension day. Jesus, accepting His work on earth, the work that God had sent Him to do, was complete and now it was time to depart His earthly life. Before he departed, he commissioned those first disciples to carry on His work on earth and to spread the gospel of God. He prayed God would support them in all He had instructed and prepared them to do. A commissioning that has surpassed the generations and is now in our hands to carry on for the next generations

You may recall me commenting last Sunday on how Peter, in his first letter seemed to have our current situation well and truly sussed out. No more so than today, I quote, 'Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.' He is not kidding, he was not then and he is not now.

Following some very good reasoning, he reminds us that it is God himself who will restore, support and strengthen us.

All the readings point us to the power of what will come next Sunday in that great Pentecost celebration that centuries later still sustains us in our daily lives whatever the situations we find ourselves in.

Collect for the day

O God the king of Glory. You have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: we beseech you, 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, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

A reading from the 1st letter of Peter

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

⁶ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

⁸ Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

A reading from the Gospel according to John

¹⁷ After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶ "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸ for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.



Words from Fr Rodney

They say that patience is a virtue, and certainly we've all had our patience tried in so many ways over these last few weeks. Before Jesus left his followers on the day of his ascension, He told his disciples to pray and wait patiently in Jerusalem and they would be "clothed with power from on high". But how long those few days must have seemed to them until his promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. Patience is a virtue that our modern world finds very difficult. Those of us who are older will remember the excitement of waiting for Christmas or our birthday or for some special occasion or event, and that the waiting was part of what made the occasion so special. As Christians we are called to wait on God, and while we do so to watch and pray. As we look towards Pentecost this year let us use this time to "watch and pray", seeking God's blessing and healing on our lives and on our world, and the strengthening and renewal of our faith and hope and trust in Him. As the first disciples were called to watch and pray as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit, let us join in prayer for and with people of faiths and none, in praying for the Spirit of healing, forgiveness and love to be poured upon people everywhere.

Intercessions

Let us pray

As Christ prayed for us before his ascension we pray for his church in the world and ask that our divisions be forgiven and healed. We pray that through the Holy Spirit our hearts and minds are opened to see and bear witness to the light of the hope to which we have been called. Amen

God our father, as we pray for your blessings on this service we give you thanks for this opportunity for worship and fellowship with all those joining us today. Help us to be the kind of church needed in the world today, a church inspired by your spirit, filled with love and compassion and capable of responding to the needs of those around us. Amen

God our father we pray for those less fortunate than ourselves, those living in areas of the world without peace and stability. Help us and our leaders to be mindful of those who struggle to maintain even the basic necessities of life, those who are homeless, hungry and desperate. We also pray for the voluntary agencies attempting to bring relief in such difficult circumstances. Amen

God our father we pray for our friends, families and neighbours, that they are safe and that those vulnerable members of our communities access the help they need. In particular we pray for children and young people at a time when they would be normally facing exams, show us how we might best meet their needs and help them with their problems as they worry about their futures. Amen

God our father, we pray for those who are ill, those who care for them and their loved ones, we ask that they are given courage, hope and peace as well as the knowledge that you are with them in their suffering. We especially pray for all those we wish to pray for today....

God our father, we pray for all those whose hearts have been saddened by the death of someone close and dear to them, particularly those known to us, those who have lost their lives in the pandemic and those whose anniversaries fall around this time. In our sadness help us to draw comfort from the Holy Spirit within us and the knowledge that out of darkness comes light. Amen

In a moment of silence bring your own prayers to God

The Lords prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.



In a Cloud

by Ruth Burgess – taken from Fire and Bread

In a cloud. A cloud?
A bit dramatic wasn't it Jesus
A bit over the top

Hands raised. Floating heavenwards
And I'll lay odds that future artists will dress you in shining white,
and paint the sky deep blue – to 'match' your eyes.

Ok – so there were some precedents:
Elijah and his chariots, and that fiery cloudy pillar thing that moved around the wilderness; but those were the old ways – you are'nt like that.

Is this really what you want us to remember about you, Jesus?
That you disappeared in a cloud and that you now live somewhere above the skies,
way beyond our reach?

What about your stories, your friendship; your tears, your pain, your laughter?
What about the way you believed in us, trusted us, sent us out to teach and heal?

I'm not sure that you being alive somewhere where we cannot see you, talk with you, laugh and cry with you, is going to be much help to us, Jesus

Please can't you find a way of living with us, close enough somewhere for us to know that you're near?

You said something once about a Spirit,
a Holy Spirit from God, who would come to us.
Does that mean you're coming back to us?

And if you are – no dramatics this time, please Jesus
Just come back to us, quietly ...
No more clouds - please