



It is 40 days since we celebrated Jesus rising from the tomb. In the 40 days after the resurrection Jesus made himself known to his disciples and his friends. He had walked with them, shared meals with them, inspired them, educated them and instructed them. It was way back on that first Easter day, when Jesus, talking in the garden to Mary Magdalene, having told her not to hold him as he had not yet ascend to the Father, that he gave the first vague clue that he would, one day ascend to His Father. 40 days later with His disciples, His closest friends, with him, he gave his final earthly instructions to them and departed from them. Those final instructions commissioned His disciples to spread the Gospel. It is a reminder today, that 20 centuries later, that same commissioning has been passed down the generations and it is now our responsibility to spread the gospel of our Lord.

Over the 40 days there had been the doubters, the sceptics, those who had to see to believe but now, just as Jesus is finally taken from them, they show confidence in their beliefs, they don't know when the next step will come but they seem very happy to follow his instructions and believe it will. They don't know what form it will take, only yet another cryptic clue for them, that whatever it was, it would come as Jesus had gone. Today we know what and when, but that is a great celebration for another Sunday.

Collect for the day

Grant, we pray, almighty God, that as we believe your only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens, so we in our heart and mind may also ascend and with him continually dwell;
Who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

¹ In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶ 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."

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³ and they were continually in the temple blessing God.



Words from Fr Rodney

In his earthly ministry Jesus has gathered around him his disciples and other followers. Even after his resurrection they have still looked to Him, and depended on Him, to teach them and show them the way. But if they are to become the disciples He needs them to be, they have to take responsibility themselves for the work and witness He is entrusting to them. His ascension marks that change, but it comes with the assurance that He will not just leave them to struggle on alone but will provide them with everything they need. But it isn't until Pentecost that the disciples saw that promise fulfilled with the coming of the Holy Spirit. During this time I'm sure that we have all felt something of what those first disciples must have felt on the first Ascension Day and the days that followed. We have had taken away from us so many of the things that usually feed our faith, not least the Eucharist and the weekly fellowship we share together. Here on Ascension Day, unlike the first disciples, we can celebrate his promise that He is with us always, and that we have the strength and comfort of the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide us in all He asks of us. Jesus Christ is risen and ascended. Alleluia

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

We pray for the needs of the world, for peace between warring nations, for a more just division of the world's resources and a compassionate treatment of one another's wounds and needs, particularly at this time. Amen

We pray for our families, communities, friends and neighbours and we give thanks for the relationships in which the spirit of love unites and blesses us all. We pray especially for all those who personify the power and strength of your spirit through their work and sacrifice, bringing support to those who need it during the present situation. Amen

We pray for those who are sick in body, mind or spirit, those who care for them and their loved ones, especially those we wish to pray for tonight...We ask that through the power of the Holy Spirit they are given strength, courage and faith to see them through the dark times into the light of hope.. Amen

Finally, let us pray for all those who have died and for those who grieve, particularly any known to us....we thank you for the times we shared and as we remember the rich and wonderful blessings promised to those who believe in him, we ask that they rest in peace and rise in glory, 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'n't 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