

Ascension Day Sermon
Bishop Jonathan Gibbs – 18th May 2020

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It's very good to be with you as we celebrate the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It seems to me that three themes have dominated the public mood over the last 7 or 8 weeks since the start of the Corona Virus crisis.

Fear – fear of illness, fear of death, fear of the loss of loved ones.

Uncertainty – about what the future holds, about what will happen, uncertainty about whether anyone is in charge of all of this.

..... and thirdly and more recently, **impatience** about the lockdown, we want to get on with things, to resume normal service and get back to our normal lives. Three themes reflected also in the lives of the Disciples between Good Friday and the Ascension of Jesus.

Fear following the death of Jesus, fear that evil had really won after all, fear of those seeking to snuff out the infant Christian community. Uncertainty, also about what did it all mean, what was going on, what would the future hold? yes **anxiety** about that and then thirdly of course perhaps – right now at Ascension, impatience. Jesus ascended into heaven but he told the Disciples to stay where they were and do nothing until the time came.

I would suggest that the message and meaning of what happened between Good Friday and Ascension answered all of these questions and responded to each of these emotions for the Disciples and for us today.

Firstly, the Disciples fear was answered by the resurrection of Jesus, he had conquered death, evil had not had the last word and their fear was answered also by the words of Jesus to his Disciples – Peace be with you.

Jesus speaks those same words to us today in our fear – Peace be with you, I am with you always to the end of the age and then secondly, their uncertainty was answered by Jesus's resurrection and by his Ascension. In the end, evil had not had the last word and more than that the crucified one had now ascended into heaven to be seated at the father's right hand. Of course there are still questions, of course there is still chaos and confusion around us but the one who was crucified now reigns in heaven at the father's side, he is the sovereign Lord of all creation and he holds us in his hands.

And then finally, the Disciples' impatience and their desire to get on with things really the flip-side of their anxiety and for us, answered by the promise of the spirit at Pentecost.

Jesus said stay here until you have been clothed with power from on high, then you will go out and be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.

The Disciples were given a new mission and a new purpose, which was to share in God's plan to reconcile all people to himself in Christ. I do believe that what is going on at present for all the sadness and chaos that it has brought represents a new opportunity and a new challenge to us as Christians to go out into the world with the good news of Christ and to be as witnesses in both word and deed offering a new way of living to the people of our generation, a new way of living that accords with God's reign of justice and peace instead of the crazy destructive way of living that preceded the coming of this crisis.

Jesus is risen, Jesus is our ascended King. Jesus promises his spirit to equip us to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Let us pray.....

Lord Jesus Christ

We celebrate your victory over death and your ascension into heaven

Thank you that you are the King of creation who rules over all

Help us to wait in patience and trust for the gift of your spirit and as we receive that gift so to be sent out to your witnesses to a troubled and needy world, we ask it for your name's sake.

Amen