

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

12th May 2021

Tomorrow is Ascension Day. Despite it being one of the important feasts of the Church, we are often not quite sure what to do with the Ascension. I imagine the disciples felt the same! What they did was go back to Jerusalem. There, as St Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles, they constantly devoted themselves to prayer while they waited for the Holy Spirit which Jesus had promised would come. Perhaps they wondered what this 'Holy Spirit' was, what it would be like, how they would know when it arrived. They waited to find out.

Perhaps we are more likely to think of Advent as the season when the Church waits in eager anticipation for what is to come but traditionally we have also been encouraged to share the time of waiting between Ascension Day and Pentecost with the disciples. For centuries this period of time has been a special time of prayer and preparation as we wait to celebrate afresh the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church. I'm not sure how conscious of that we had been in recent years. Now the 'Thy Kingdom Come' global prayer movement seeks to introduce a fresh perspective to this season*.

I want to stay with that sense of waiting. Maybe we too ask the same questions as the disciples. Perhaps we would like a nice clear definition of the Holy Spirit. If we could 'package' it, if we knew what we were looking for, it would make life so much easier. Instead I think that Ann Lewin's poem 'Wait for the Spirit' tells us a lot about how we might most fruitfully spend this time:

Wait ...
Without expectation
Which might focus
Attention too narrowly,
So that we miss the coming.

Wait with expectancy, alert,
Hearts, mind, hands, ears
Open to receive the gift.

(from 'Watching for the Kingfisher')

I'm reminded of Mary Magdalen standing at the tomb on the first Easter morning. Her expectations initially prevented her from recognising the Risen Christ standing beside her; her attention was too narrowly focused. I wonder how often we try to 'second guess' God; how often we expect him to do as we would do. It has been said that we limit God by the smallness and narrowness of our expectations of him. Are we prepared to let him break down our barriers and, like Mary, to hear the 'gardener' speaking to us?

We've all done a lot of waiting over the last year or so: waiting for the first lockdown to end, waiting for the second one to end so we could celebrate Christmas together, waiting for the vaccine to be developed, approved and then made available, waiting to see family and friends -

the list could go on and on. As I write, we are waiting for the next relaxation in restrictions and then we will have to wait again. Some people feel that we've waited long enough, if not indeed too long. Some people are anxious now; some may be eager to push ahead. I think this very specific season of waiting between Ascension Day and Pentecost can teach us more general lessons too. Watching for the movement of the Spirit, being open to its promptings, receiving the gifts it brings should be part of our daily lives. The message, now and as we move forwards, will be different for each of us and we need to honour it, putting our trust in God.

You may have seen in the recent Newsletter that next week's 'Thought for the Week' will be the last for the time being so I would like explain why and to ask for your understanding and prayers. When I started 'Thought for the Week' as a resource during lockdown in March 2020 I imagined that it would only be for a few weeks! It has grown into something much bigger than I could possibly have envisaged. Next week's will be the 60th 'Thought'. I've enjoyed writing them and have been encouraged by your appreciative comments. Nevertheless I don't want 'Thought for the Week' to lose what I hope is still its freshness or to become repetitive, so it seems sensible to take a break. My initial thought was to re-introduce it just during Advent and Lent. However, in response to what some of you have said, I am now thinking of only taking a three month break and resuming 'Thought for the Week' in September.

With love and prayers

Camilla

* In 2016 the Archbishops of Canterbury and York launched the 'Thy Kingdom Come' initiative. It has now become a global prayer movement with more than 80 denominations in 172 countries taking part. Although it has a particular focus on mission, Archbishop Justin has also written that 'In praying 'Thy Kingdom Come' we all commit to playing our part in the renewal of the nations and the transformation of communities.'

You can find both more information and resources on the Church of England's own website and on www.thykingdomcome.global.