

## **Ascension Day**

### **Theme: Leave Taking and hope**

Ascension Day is an appropriate day to be saying farewell to Yunghee. It is a day of leave taking. The resurrected Christ says farewell to his disciples and tells them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The leave taking on Ascension Day is a very different one from the crucifixion, where Jesus was torn from the Disciples by men at arms and died a cruel death. That leave taking seemed to take everything and left the disciples in despair. This leave taking ends not in the darkness of the sealed tomb, but in a cloud.

When Jesus says farewell to the disciples on the mountain they are full of questions. They want to know if the Kingdom is going to come now. They want certainty and clarity, what they get is a cloud.

While in the tradition of Christian Art the Ascension is depicted with great clarity, the witness of scripture is rather different. The Gospel writers talk of a cloud descending on Jesus and when it lifts, he is gone.

The cloud is a symbol for the imminent presence of God used in numerous places in the Old Testament, as well as on the mount of Transfiguration in the Gospels.

This is a stark contrast with the imagery we are familiar with, of the dawning of faith. Light is used as a metaphor for the deepening of insight that comes with faith and conversion is often talked of as enlightenment. The journey of faith begins with an experience of light and clarity. As people travel further on the journey of faith and come closer to God that closeness is often represented as a cloud in the scriptures.

In answer to their request for details of time and date for his return Jesus tells the disciples that it is not for them to know. It is not for us to know.

They and we will be given power, a share in God's work of transformation and redemption through the Holy Spirit, but we cannot yet know exactly where we are going.

It is a powerful reminder of the difference between this leave taking and the crucifixion. That ending seemed absolutely clear in its finality, in its bleakness, in its despair. There was nothing left.

Endings after the resurrection are different. Endings can be absolutely surprising, like the resurrection, they are gate ways into mystery. While the endings of death and sin are absolute, the endings of eternal life, of God's purposes are mysterious and life giving. The mountain is shrouded in cloud.

The crucifixion with its apparent certainty and clarity is a dead end and a dead ending. The endings of the Kingdom of God are unclear, uncertain, mysterious and require of us faith. This is true faith; not knowing and understanding what is happening.

That is not for us to know, but trusting in God's presence when we cannot see and do not know.

As the church we are called to wait. This is true faith, not to finally understand, but to accept that we cannot understand and still to trust that God is good. Just like when we wake up and draw the curtains on a foggy day we trust that the familiar world is still there, but we just can't see it at the moment.

This is a time of waiting.

Waiting for lockdown to end,

Yunghee is waiting to start her new job,

We are waiting to return to our churches.

We are waiting for the Holy Spirit to come

We are waiting to be ready for Christ's return.

Waiting is a really important part of being the church.

The traditional images of the ascension emphasise the

Glory and majesty of Christ returning to his rightful

throne in heaven. And that is true.

But there is another truth as well, the experience of the disciples. They were left in the cloud. They did not know what to expect, but because of the Resurrection they could trust without needing to know. They kept together, they kept praying together, they were united and present when the Spirit came at Pentecost.

The waiting we are called to as the church is a very particular kind of waiting. It is the embodiment of hope. It is a waiting where things are quietly changing and growing like a child in the womb. It is the waiting that allows something new to take shape.

In the waiting times in the church, if we have faith and abide with each other and God, something new can take shape. We start to be made through God's grace into a new creation, into people fit for the Kingdom of God.

As we wait together now, let us invite the Holy Spirit to come to us, let us ask for faith to live hopefully in the cloud of unknowing.

Let us trust that God is with us and is leading us to His Kingdom even though we cannot see the way.

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