

## Reflection for Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May (7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter)

### Readings for the day

#### *Acts 1.6-14*

When the apostles met together, they asked Jesus, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

#### *John 17.1-11*

Jesus looked towards heaven and prayed:

“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one.”

## Reflection – ‘What next’

As Jesus ascended into heaven, his disciples remained looking into the sky and Luke gives us the impression that they remained that way for a little while as he tells us that two angels appeared and asked them ‘Why do you stand here looking into the sky?’ I wonder what they were thinking. They had been with Jesus for three years in which their world had been turned upside down. It had been a thrilling ride through miracles, amazing teaching, seeing the self-important religious authorities put in their place, learning to pray, discovering that God could do miracles through them and much more. Then the arrest, trial and horrible crucifixion of Jesus, when they had hidden in fear for their own lives. But then he had risen. He had conquered even death itself. No wonder the disciples had asked him ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He was the victorious Messiah.

Then suddenly he was gone again. It isn’t surprising that they were left looking up into the sky. It occurred to me that ‘What next?’ might well have been what they were thinking. The Holy Spirit had not yet come on them in power and, although Jesus had told them about the Holy Spirit, I doubt that they really understood what would happen on the day of Pentecost. They couldn’t go back to their old ‘normal’ lives as fishermen or tax collectors as though the last three years had never happened. So what next? What would ‘the new normal’ be?

That phrase ‘the new normal’ is one that few of us would have heard of at the beginning of this year but now – as we hope for the Coronavirus cases to continue to fall and the lockdown measures to be gradually eased in the coming weeks – we wonder what the new normal will be and what life will be like. ‘What next?’

Thinking about this, I was reminded of a poem that is sometimes read at the beginning of a new year. King George VI used this poem in his Christmas address in 1939.

*And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:*

*“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.”*

*And he replied:*

*“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.*

*That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”*

*So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.*

*And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.*

(from the poem ‘God knows’ by Minnie Louise Haskins)

Many of us have found these recent months difficult in a whole spectrum of different ways. For some there has been grief at the loss of someone they have known and loved.

It is natural that we are anxious about the future and the uncertainties it holds. Yet those words of Minnie Haskins remain true. There is nowhere life can take us that Jesus has not already been; no path we can tread where he will not be there walking beside us.

The first disciples looking into the sky on the day of Jesus’s ascension did not know what the future would hold but they trusted him and when the Holy Spirit came on them they became

the witnesses he had told them they would be. They began an adventure that changed the world stretching down through the centuries to your life and mine today.

As we look at the future with all its unknowns and ask ourselves 'What next?', I pray that we will each in our own way, be able to follow those wise words.

*"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.*

*That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."*