

# Sunday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021 – 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

*Acts 1.15-17, 21-end; Psalm 1; John 17.6-19*

Today is a special Sunday. In the revisions of Church of England services that took place in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus for the season in which this Sunday today stands, is looking forward to the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gospel story for this season is about how the first disciples responded to their spiritual experience of feeling the risen Jesus finally moving on from having a physical presence among them. In particular the gospel story is about their trust in the promise of Jesus that the gift of the Holy Spirit was nearly upon them.

So these ten days from Ascension to Pentecost, we are in a short season of expectation, looking forward to the work of the Holy Spirit. The interesting thing is the way that this liturgical development has now taken off as a new global movement. Just in recent years, a truly global church movement has grown up, started by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, calling the Church to a special time of prayer in this season. It's called "Thy Kingdom Come".

Do Google it. Do look at the diocesan and Church of England websites. There are lots of resources that people can use, individually, or in families, or in groups, with readings and prayers and ways of praying. Thy Kingdom Come is essentially a call to prayer for the mission of the Church and the future of the Church; in the confident expectation that the Holy Spirit is already at work in the life of the Church. The call is to respond to where the Holy Spirit leading, in the lives of individual Christians, and in the lives of churches.

The Ascension of Jesus marks the point in the story of our salvation, when the ministry of Jesus passes from the local to the global, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is the ways it happens. There are at least three messages in the Ascension of Jesus. It is the final step in revealing who Jesus really is - he is the Lord of heaven, the Lord of eternal life. He promises that he will welcome his brothers and sisters there too – that includes you and me. And the third message is the promise of his continuing presence amongst us by the Holy Spirit, "I will not leave you comfortless."

The disciples responded to their experience of the ascension of Jesus, by turning to joyful, confident and expectant prayer. They waited and they prayed, joyfully, so that when the Spirit was indeed given, they were ready. This is what we are called to do too in this season, and it is reflected in the final part of this service today. It seems to me that this has a special resonance in these strange times of pandemic. For we are all looking forward too, but often with some apprehension.

The Lockdown is being lifted; we are looking forward to better times, different times, but it is a confusing time. It's easy to lose our bearings; amongst the different priorities, challenges

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and complexities, in all the balancing of individual freedoms with community benefits. It's important for us not to rush out and anticipate restored freedoms too freely, but rather to think about what now is most important. It is indeed a time to think and pray carefully.

It is a time for the whole Church to think and pray, about what we are going to do differently in future. Everyone knows that the Coronavirus crisis has changed the world; and the Church is surely being changed too. And for Christians, the most important thing to do when things change, is to pray, to get our bearings from God, and from our faith in Jesus, and not just to react instinctively or habitually. What needs to be restored? What needs to be left behind? What is God telling us about the things that are now most important?

Praying is always a good thing to do. When we pray, we become better prepared for what is to come; stronger, more resilient, more in touch with God and with one another. When we pray, we are less driven by our own weaknesses and anxieties and fears, and we are more in touch with the eternal and loving purposes of God, revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

So do use this time to pray, maybe to start or restart a pattern of prayer. There are lots of resources provided for Thy Kingdom Come. You can do it alone or with others. It will make you stronger and more joyful, whatever challenges you face and whatever challenges the Church faces.

And know that when you pray, the Holy Spirit is helping you to know God and to know Jesus better. And as you allow yourself more time to pray regularly, you will also find that you are more in touch with what God is doing in your life and in the life of your church. And like the first disciples, you will find the joy of the Lord Jesus rising in your hearts. Amen.

CJ. 16:05:21