

## **Seventh Sunday of Easter**

**Reading: Psalm 68:4**

**Acts 1:6-14**

### **Psalm 68:4**

Sing to God, sing praises to his name;  
prepare a way for him who rides on the clouds.  
His name is the Lord - be glad in his presence!

### **Acts 1:6-14**

<sup>6</sup>When the apostles met together with Jesus, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time give the Kingdom back to Israel?"

<sup>7</sup>Jesus said to them, "The times and occasions are set by my Father's own authority, and it is not for you to know when they will be. <sup>8</sup>But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup>After saying this, he was taken up to heaven as they watched him, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

<sup>10</sup>They still had their eyes fixed on the sky as he went away, when two men dressed in white suddenly stood beside them <sup>11</sup>and said, "Galileans, why are you standing there looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you saw him go to heaven."

<sup>12</sup>Then the apostles went back to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is about half a mile away from the city. <sup>13</sup>They entered the city and went up to the room where they were staying: Peter, John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Patriot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup>They gathered frequently to pray as a group, together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.



This week comes as a Part 1 to a story that will have its' climax next Sunday. It's a story about a group of men, and then women too, who gather together, in a sort of enforced time alone to wait to move from one sort of normality to another 'new normal'.

These followers of Jesus have gone through a roller-coaster of emotions in the last six weeks. It all started with the crucifixion of their beloved Jesus on Good Friday. Then they spent three days in mourning, in fear for their own lives, feeling guilty over what they had done, and in utter confusion about their future now that Jesus' mission had apparently failed - they had hoped that Jesus would establish a new Kingdom on earth, that he would hail in a new era for the people of Israel, freeing them from the tyranny of Roman rule, but that hadn't happened. Then came the rumours that Jesus was alive, turning their loss into hope, joy and sheer perplexity of what was going on. Then comes, at last, normality again, though a much more wonderful 'new normality' with Jesus back among them. He spends the next 40 days with them. . It must have been a blissful 40 days for the eleven. No longer 12, for Judas is no longer with them, having committed suicide with remorse over his betrayal of Jesus. We are not told of any more mass gatherings or healings. Jesus seems to have spent this time solely with his closest friends, John's gospel account gives us details of meals they shared, preaching and explaining things to them, making them feel at the centre of God's world, as he always did. It must have been a time of deep joy.

Clearly his disciples are imagining that life will go on like it used to in the old days, only better. Is this to be the 'new normal'? Jesus is concentrating solely on them. He listens to them and answers their questions without any of the impatience or teasing that seemed to sometimes be present in their relationship before. In Luke's description of Jesus' ascension, we read 'When the apostles met together with Jesus, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time give the Kingdom back to Israel?' (1:6) They have forgotten all their doubts about his mission and are back believing that Jesus is going to take over Israel, and that they will be part of the new ruling party.

But then comes the bolt out of the blue: He is not going to stay. Just as things seem to be settling down, He is leaving. He expects them to carry on without him. He gives them the job of spreading the news about Jesus to everyone, starting in Jerusalem and ending at the ends of the earth. No pressure then! Then He leaves them, 'taken up to heaven as they watched him, and a cloud hid him from their sight'

I wonder how it all looked that day we know now as Ascension Day, which was celebrated by the church last Thursday. I've tried to imagine the scene but I just don't know where to begin. I wonder how long the disciples stood there, just looking into space? Did they think Jesus might reappear again if they waited there long enough? From the reading it seems like they waited some time, for two men in white appear as if to jerk them back to reality, if that is possible. 'Galileans, why are you standing there looking at the sky? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you saw Him go' .

Yet more emotions for these poor men to deal with, but I think they are all out of feelings at the moment, for the description of their trudge back to Jerusalem sounds so flat, - no fear, no despair, no joy. They are all out of feelings. They stay together in Jerusalem waiting to see what is going to happen next. They met with the women of the group as well, and we read that they 'gathered frequently to pray.'

So they waited staying together as a community and they pray. Jesus told them that God is going to send them the Power to carry out Jesus' command. They don't know what this going to look like, but from all that has already happened perhaps they are beginning to realise that whatever it is, it is going to be bigger than anything they can possibly imagine. So they stay together and they pray.

Community and prayer is to become the defining characteristics of the early Christians. Community and prayer should be the defining characteristics of Christians today. Like the apostles we sometimes feel that we are trying to keep up with what God is doing. God works in ways we don't always understand but He needs us to do some of His work for Him. Like the apostles who were given the Great Commission to go and tell the whole world the Good News of new life, to be found in Jesus, when we repent of our sins and follow Him, we too are expected to do the same. The book the Acts of the Apostles tells the story of their journey to spread the Gospel. It starts with them in Jerusalem and ends with Paul in Rome. Between them they have done what was asked of them - the Roman Empire was the extent of their world, and they have taken the Gospel message to every corner. The baton has been passed on to the following generations and now comes down to us. Our job is to spread the Good News too, where we are.

Jesus told his apostles they would be filled with Power, and that is why they are to wait in Jerusalem. God never gives us a job to do without giving us the tools to do it. Or as you've heard said before 'God doesn't choose the equipped, He equips the chosen.' God will

empower his apostles to carry out the work Jesus has left them to do. And He continues to empowers us today with the same Holy Spirit.

So, we will leave this seemingly leaderless, emotionally drained bunch of waifs and strays, and see what happens to them next week. We will leave them waiting, spending time together and in prayer, wondering what the 'new normal' for them is going to look like.

I will leave you in the same way - not as leaderless, emotionally drained waifs and strays, but as followers of Jesus who spend time in prayer, because you know and love your Lord. We too are waiting to see how things are going to turn out. We are going to need new ways to navigate into life after lockdown, but God is with us. He loves us. He equips us with the power of His Holy Spirit. He has a plan, and if all we read in the Bible is an example, then His plan is mightier and more amazing than anything we can possibly imagine.

Be encouraged.

God loves you.

Wait, watch and pray, and pray, and pray.

Amen.

Between Ascension Day and Pentecost Sunday, which is next Sunday, millions of Christians from around the world will be praying for more people to come to know Jesus, as part of the global prayer movement, Thy Kingdom Come. May I encourage you, this week, as we wait, to join this worldwide wave of prayer for more people to come and know the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

<https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

Music:

We are waiting - Fanny Crosby: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLkd1vRIN8w>

Come people of the Risen King - Keith & Kristyn Getty:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD2KYdHyX44>

Prayer:

Almighty God,  
your ascended Son has sent us into the world  
to preach the good news of your kingdom:  
inspire us with your Spirit  
and fill our hearts with the fire of your love,  
that all who hear your Word may be drawn to you  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. All Amen.

*Collect for Thy Kingdom Come*