

Dear Friend

You might have thought that Easter Sunday was the most important date in the calendar for Christians – the day we celebrate the resurrection, that recognition through miracle that Christ is indeed the promised Messiah, God here among us.

On Thursday of this week, we celebrate Ascension Day. Just as important as Easter Day, for without the Ascension, we would not have the final part of the puzzle – Christ was not just the one who overcame death (Harry Potter, eat your heart out!), he wasn't resurrected as a human to die again at some stage as all of us must, but to live forever. For such an important part of our faith, there is surprisingly little written in the gospels about the Ascension, certainly when we compare it with Easter.

I suspect joining in with a church service on a Thursday can be very difficult for some people as work and family life still have to continue. This year of course, you can watch the service from your own homes with the luxury of selecting what time you worship if you are unable to join at 8pm.

Traditionally, the Feast of the Ascension was well celebrated and is mentioned in William Blake's poem 'Holy Thursday':

Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean  
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green  
Grey headed beadles walkd before, with wands as white as snow  
Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow

O what a multitude they seemd these flowers of London town  
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own  
The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs  
Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song  
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among  
Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor  
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door

Can you imagine today 6,000 people singing in St Paul's Cathedral? (Obviously post-lockdown!) Apparently that was the typical size of congregation there for such a service at the time Blake penned this poem.

Our congregations may be physically split and isolated at this time, but we are still able to celebrate and give thanks for all that God has given us. And, for me, the wonderful thing about the Ascension is that it gives us hope, it gives us a reason to continue to believe in God's promises, it affirms our faith and sets us free to follow Christ. What more could we ask for at a time like this?!

Jeremiah 29:11 gives us wise guidance on the subject of hope: 'For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.'

May your day be filled with the confidence that hope brings, that we will rise to the challenge of building God's kingdom in this time of difficulty and may you find the peace of the Lord in your lives this day. Stay safe, and let us know if you need anything!

Linda