

Dear Friends

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, we celebrate Ascension Day. The “beam me up Scotty” moment in the Christian Calendar. Well actually not really. Ascension Day has more to do with theology than geography.

Ascension is not about Jesus defying gravity but rather defying and defeating the principalities and powers that weigh down on the shoulders of the marginalised poor and vulnerable of society with a force heavier than gravity.

Ascension Day is a radically subversive day; as the early disciples of Jesus reached the conviction to start singing that Jesus, and not Caesar, was Lord. It was a very distressing day for the political powers! And of course, it was a very dangerous day for the followers of Jesus who were now deemed a great threat by these powers. But more than dangerous it was hope-full: full of a hope that was able to disperse their fear and despair and encourage them to face the danger. Their hope rested in trusting that Jesus reigns — that Jesus is the power above all other powers. The early disciples knew they were on the winning side and were released to imagine a new world and creatively live it out – finding expression in the life of the Early Church.

The Early Church were a group of people who had nothing else in common, but their love for Jesus. They were all there, their differences overcome, for the simple reason that they adored Him. Christians have been drawn together for the same reason ever since. Even in this Circuit – we are drawn together every Sunday in spite of our differences, because we remember Jesus.

There is something about the everlasting Christ that draws people together. And when people are drawn together in a Christian fellowship, they all share on an equal basis, to varying degrees the same experience.

Ascension also reminds us that Pentecost is coming! It is of course at Pentecost when this diverse, alternative community finds itself wonderfully expressed. Everyone understood each other at Pentecost, because they were talking about the same thing, the wondrous thing of God. We are drawn together by God’s love and when talking about this common experience, we should be able to share in a Spirit of unity, reconciliation and understanding.

As a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the disciples became aware of a new inward power which completely changed their whole outlook. They believed this because they were possessed by the Spirit of God. They became aware of the Spirit as a Power, because of the promise of Acts 1:8, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”. It is in this spirit of power that they were to spread the gospel: “And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth”. It was this Spirit that made it possible for them to not just imagine a new world, but to live obediently and to proclaim the gospel courageously.

I was so encouraged at one of our churches, where they have started using name tags on a Sunday morning – encouraging their diverse congregation to get to know each other better. There is nothing as affirming as knowing that someone remembers your name (especially when you are new). This very simple exercise is an effort to build relationships and to create a loving, affirming and diverse community, where differences are respected and valued. Well done!

Many of you will also be involved with Christian Aid Week (starting on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May), doing your bit for the marginalised and the poor. In doing that, you will be living the message of the Ascension (hope for the hopeless).

At this very moment in our world’s history, we can create alternative communities of grace

and love, where all feel welcome, cared for and all are affirmed. In doing this, we become subversive – holding before the world a model that is so different from those powerful voices that encourage fear and hatred.

The God of the Ascension and Pentecost empowers us to bring hope and to be (like the Early Church), that alternative reality. We know nothing can change this fragmented world, but only a power greater than anything, the Holy Spirit. And we can be the loving, inclusive community through which the Spirit can work to do that.

Grace

Romeo.