

Dear Friends,

It was really good to share in worship with many of you again on Sunday. My thanks to all those who assisted in making it possible. It's great to "see" one another and it's also good that it's something we can do together as a section of churches. Thursday is Ascension Day and that is another of our significant dates in the Christian year that we shall be marking very differently this year.

The Ascension isn't an easy concept for us to grasp because what actually happened is difficult to picture and even more difficult to describe. What we know is that the risen Jesus disappeared from sight and he was never seen again by human eyes. He was visible one moment and gone the next. There is a medieval picture of the ascension which shows the eleven disciples looking up into the sky. There above them are two legs disappearing up into the clouds. I don't find that very helpful because it gives the impression that Jesus was like a rocket. Jesus didn't just blast off from the earth and disappear from view like a rocket. Neither was he a magician, this isn't the first recorded vanishing trick.

The Ascension is hard to picture or describe but what really matters is its meaning and significance. The Ascension marks an important change, it's the end of one phase and the start of another. When the Eighth Army won the Battle of El Alamein, Churchill said it wasn't the beginning of the end, it was the end of the beginning. The Ascension marks the end of the beginning, it marks the end of the earthly existence of Jesus, the end of his visible ministry. The Ascension was the point when the resurrection appearances ended, it was the last time Jesus was seen, Jesus wasn't seen again by human eye.

That doesn't mean that Jesus has left us, in fact it means the opposite, now Jesus is always with us. Jesus is still with us, but he is with us in an excitingly new way. Jesus isn't physically present with us, we can't see him with our eyes, we can't touch him with our hands. He is with us but he is no longer limited by the restrictions of space and time. Before he could only be in one place at one time, just like us. We may wish that we could be in two places at once. I know I've often thought how much easier it would make things if I could be at two meetings at once. Jesus couldn't be in two places at once any more than I could.

Now Jesus is no longer limited in that way, he is with us wherever we are, whatever we're doing. We can turn to him at any time, in any place, we can be aware of his presence with us. The Ascension means that Jesus is no longer limited by space or time, he is with us each moment of each day.

With best wishes,

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