

7.30pm Ascension Day 14 May 2026 – St Andrew's Cherry Hinton

Acts 1:4-11, Eph 1:15-end, Luke 24:44-end – *The transforming power of the risen Christ*

All week the news has been full of questions about leadership, about authority, about the power of setting out a vision for a different kind of future. I promise I'm not making a party-political point here; something all clergy know they must never do. But I've been reminded of a workshop I took part in at Birmingham NEC at the Festival of Quilts several years ago. We all had to think of a motto, and then were given 30 minutes, and a piece of cotton fabric, paper, scissors and glue, to turn our motto into a reality. This is mine: **Change is good**. Of course, there's a personal backstory to why I chose that motto, but for now, let's stick to the Ascension.

The Ascension raises big questions for us, as we ask: why did this change have to happen, and why was it good? Why did Jesus have to leave at all? What kind of king would leave his kingdom rather than wanting to restore his kingdom right there and then? Why do we have to wait for Jesus to return?

And then there are the basic questions of what really happened at the Ascension. Those surrealist pictures don't help! Feet poking out of clouds. Because actually, the eyewitness account of Jesus being lifted up and of a cloud taking him from their sight seem to have been a little bit fuzzy-round-the-edges, in the way that the memory of an event will never give you a 360° panorama; rather it will give you a vivid picture of a little part – the part you remember, whilst the surroundings are blurred.

There's no denying that, even if twentieth-century physics has made the co-existence of heaven and earth in different dimensions of time and space easier to accept now than in the age of the Enlightenment, Jesus' Ascension into heaven is still difficult for us to wrap our heads around. We tend to see, hear and experience things with our material senses, and the Ascension doesn't begin to fit into our day-to-day experience.

And yet the disciples, who weren't so very different from us, never doubted Jesus' ascension into heaven. Peter, in his Pentecost sermon and in his first letter, says Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God in heaven, and Jesus' ascension into heaven, to sit at God's right hand, becomes a crucial part of the narrative about Jesus. And week by week in each of the churches represented here, we say **he ascended into heaven**. Jesus' Ascension is there, in the Nicene Creed, and in the Apostles' Creed, *because* it is essential to Christian doctrine.

So the Ascension is too important to dismiss as a fairy-tale and we can't treat Jesus' Ascension as an optional extra in the Christian faith.

But perhaps it is the evidence of those eye-witnesses to the Ascension, and also to Jesus' teaching before and after the crucifixion, that is our best clue to how we should interpret the Ascension and understand its significance for believers. To see the Ascension as a critical step in a new appreciation of how Jesus can continue to be with us, through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had begun to prepare the disciples, even before his death, for his leaving them and for sending them the Holy Spirit in his stead. John, in his Gospel, recalls Jesus telling the disciples at the last supper, on the night that he was arrested, that the Holy Spirit would be their teacher, the one who ***will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you***. Jesus told them the Holy Spirit would be their guide; the one who ***will guide you into all truth***. And Jesus told them that when they found themselves doubting, and wondering what they could believe, the Holy Spirit ***will testify on my behalf*** witnessing to all that Jesus longs for them to understand and grasp and believe. Jesus told the disciples ***it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you***.

And as believers, we can accept that the Ascension happened, not only because of the eye-witness testimony, but because it aligns with everything that the Holy Spirit has helped us to understand about our Trinitarian God. Had Jesus remained on earth he could not have been present on earth by his Holy Spirit, working through us and enabling us to be involved in the mission of the church, testifying, through us, to the love of God and to the power of believers trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection to save us from our sinful ways and nature.

So let us celebrate the Ascension, because it is by the authority and through the transforming power of the risen Christ that we have the Holy Spirit to guide and to teach us; to convict us of our sin and to sanctify us; to empower and equip us in all that he has prepared for us to do, before Jesus returns, to claim his kingdom and to make his reign a reality for everybody.

Change is good.