

Sermon Ascension Day 2015

Today we celebrate Ascension Day as we were not together on Thursday. Ascension Day is 40 days after Easter, everybody in ancient times counted inclusively, 50 days after Easter comes Pentecost and 57 days after it is Trinity Sunday. We celebrate the ascent of Jesus into heaven, the descent of the Holy Spirit and the threefold nature of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

These are vital doctrines, for even when we believe that Jesus rose from the dead at Easter, it does not affect us until we believe that he has passed out of here into everywhere, and so is available to hear our prayers.

And we are not able to pray until we allow God the Holy Spirit to pray within us. and we cannot believe that when Jesus died and rose again, it was God himself who suffers for us when we sin, and that it is God himself who lives in our hearts and inspires us, and that they are the same God who made us and is our Father in heaven, unless we believe that God is three and God is one.

So, on these days we celebrate God's availability, God dwelling in us and God who shows love in his very nature.

But language poses a problem for us modern, scientific people. The idea of God being above the clouds was for me part of my childhood. After all the disciples were there, saw Jesus raised up and then were asked why they were looking up. Where is heaven? We thought it was up there, above the clouds. It is an invisible realm, whose boundaries are very thin, very permeable and we are charged with working to bring heaven to earth now, rather than waiting for some time when we may join God there.

How can we bring heaven to earth? I suppose in some ways that depends what your vision of heaven is, fat cherubs sitting around playing harps? Lots of people in long white dresses singing? God sitting upon a throne accepting praises? It may be all of these things or none, but what I am sure of is that heaven is about love.

The love of God for us, a love that is so deep, so true, so faithful is difficult to understand because we are the products of fallible, human love. God loves us, we love him, we love all the others whom God also loves, that full circle of love that means heaven could be on earth if only we could manage it.

If we are living life as if in preparation for eternity our lives will be full of love, love that reaches out to others, because we wouldn't be able to help loving as we are loved. What a challenge for us.

To live as if we are in heaven now, 'clothed with the power from on high', God the Holy Spirit, God within us, God around us, not someone distant up above the skies. Our God is a God of closeness, a God who is in relationship with us, a God who loves us as no-one else can. We don't worship images of him, we don't need to, he is here with us, in us, around us and in each other, so that as we see each other, we see him, because we are all made in his image.