



THIS IS YOUR SPACE TO GROW

ACTS 1:1-14 (NRSV)

“ In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This’, he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’

So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

REFLECTION POINTS 19 APRIL 2020

Notice how the disciples are still asking ‘is it time yet? Are you going to save Israel now?’ According to some theologians, this is precisely the misunderstanding of Jesus’ purpose that led Judas to betray him to the religious leaders. These disciples are the ones who have travelled with Jesus, listened to his words and teaching. They are still asking the same question. But are we so different? Which questions do we return to over and over again, even when the answer is staring us in the face?

The story takes place on a mountaintop. This is so symbolic in both the First and Second Testaments – the mountain is the place where God speaks to Moses, the place where Jesus is transfigured, the place where Abraham is tested. Mountains are part of the landscape in Palestine and agriculture and animal husbandry has been adapted to cope with the conditions and weather patterns that are created. Mountaintops are linked to spiritually moving experiences where the very presence of God is felt. It isn’t healthy to leap from one spiritual high to the next – the point is that after the high, we come down off the mountain and allow the experience to change us and shape us, form us in faith. What is your mountaintop experience? How has it formed your faith?

It would be too easy to dismiss the story as being that of naïve people. This is exactly the story of hope that the early church needed to hear – Jesus may have left, but God had made a promise to them that God was going to keep, and they just had to wait and pray, wait and pray. At this time, the early church was being persecuted both by the Roman and Jewish authorities. It must have felt as if they had no friends or allies. They needed to hear this message of hope for the future of their church in the face of these challenges. What message do we need to hear today? How are we being asked to wait and pray, not just in the current situation but beyond this?

And what of the people who gathered in that upper room? Notice who is listed here. Who is included? Who is missing? What might this tell us about community and the role of the faith community?

It's such a beautiful story of mystery and awe drawing on imagery and symbolism from the Jewish faith – think of Elijah being taken up to heaven, the images of angels in the book of Daniel and other apocryphal literature. Although this may sound like a strange story to us, it is steeped in the scriptures and religious literature of the time. Knowing that scripture always has something to say to us today, despite being written so long ago and for a different context, what might this be saying to us? What truth is being shared here?

Don't forget the cuppa calls with Rev Claire at 11.30am and 3pm on Sunday.