

Since this time last year I have been mentoring and tutoring another new groups of Deacon's in the Willesden area. There are 8 of them. While I am responsible for their training for three years, I am only their tutor for one, and in July they will move on to be mentored by a new Tutor.

This group has been different though, in that throughout all their training I did not meet them in person until yesterday. I have seen their faces and heard their voices on Zoom and the telephone – but I have not physically been with them.

To be honest, I was a little nervous about how yesterday might go – but it was fine and it was a wonderful to chat and hear their tone more clearly and find out how tall they are!! But it did realise how little I know them compared to other year groups – because we learn so much about each other in the incidental conversations over coffee, as we do in the formal teaching and sharing sessions. I have to trust in many ways that we are doing our best for this cohort in extraordinary circumstances – and that we are building on what has already taken place in their lives and training before.

It reminded me of a phrase I was taught by a mentor a number of years ago - there are things that we know, things that we hope for and things that we have to trust God for. Not only is this great phrase for learning, but it also sums up so much of the message of the ascension too!

Our Gospel reading today is Luke's version of Jesus Ascension into heaven. Luke's account is more subtle than some of the others. Luke divides his narrative into three movements, each with a distinctive theme. The past: The necessity of these things – what we know (vv. 44-47); The promise: The call to be witnesses – the hope (vv. 48-49) and “While You Wait”: The call in the meantime (vv. 50-53).¹ – to trust!

Luke is a clever writer, and unlike the other accounts, Luke places the ascension on the evening of Sunday of the resurrection. In a sense the timing doesn't matter, or how long Jesus appeared on earth after the resurrection, what matters is the message that is communicated; Luke is trying to make this as clear as he can for the disciples.

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2385

Luke starts with their journey with Jesus, reminding the disciples of what they have learnt through their time with Jesus, but also of the things they knew from before which Jesus has built on. The labour, the effort, the intent and the learning has been intense, and should not be forgotten in light of what is happening now, and what is to come. This is the same for us in our journey of faith. So often when we are rattled in our journey, or we lose sight of God in our lives we forget to look at where we have been. Surely the start of working out where we are, and where we are going is to look at where we have been. To consider the things we have known about God to be true in the past; to consider the things we have learnt, and to even ask why we have the questions that we do. Jesus' disciples must have felt the earth slipping beneath their feet at the thought of being left alone, after all that happened in Jerusalem, and Luke's account draws them back in the words of Jesus to what they have known and the reminder to hold onto it!

Luke moves from the past confirmation onto what is promised. Luke's Jesus does not dwell simply on the past. He turns the focus next to his followers: "you are witnesses of these things" (v. 48). You have seen all these things, you know what I promised and what has been fulfilled – you need to trust this.

Jesus reminds us too, we are not the first people to have questions, or feel challenged, or want to put our own mark on how we live as Christians; each generation has done the same.

As Jesus prepares to leave his disciples, he reminds them to not forget this promise, and we are invited to do the same.

The final movement of Luke's account is the main event - Jesus' Ascension. Unique to this version is the prominence of "blessing." First, while Jesus ascends, he blesses his followers, Second, after worshiping and returning to Jerusalem, his followers are "continually in the temple blessing God" (v. 53), causing Luke's Gospel to both begin and end with prayer and worship.

Jesus has told his disciples to wait for the spirit – to trust this promise – but they don't just sit around waiting – they worship. This is not a flippant thing for filling in time, it is an active celebration of God in our midst which informs what is taking place and what is to come. It is why

every year the Archbishops call us all to prayer in Thy Kingdom Come – we are called to use this time between Ascension and Pentecost to focus our minds on praying for the world.

But Luke offers us something else too in this reminder, that when we don't know what to do – pray. When we are waiting – worship. When we are uncertain – turn to God.

Luke concludes his gospel with Jesus giving guidance to how his followers are to live: worshipping God, waiting on Jesus' promises, and doing so "with great joy". Later writers and followers will build on this, including the writer to the letter to the Ephesians we heard earlier – they build on the theme of ascension as a call for the church to "know" God's power as it is revealed in Christ. (vv. 22-23)².

Liturgically this week we sit between the ascension and the promise of the spirit which will come at Pentecost. It is a time of the churches year which calls us to pray – to worship in our waiting.

Now the spirit of God is always praying within us whether we are aware or not, but this is a time to focus in on that spirit of prayer and yearning. But however you hear this message, we are invited in this time of waiting to pray and worship – wherever we are, reminded that we know the story, we know the promise and now it is time to act.

It is a time that reminds us that there are things that we know, things that we hope for and things that we have to trust God for. There is so much pain, so much need in our world at present. But there is also much to give thanks to God for – which is why we are called to pray. For in our prayer and worship we see not only God, but also we see more fully the truth of ourselves. And like those first disciples it is in our worship that we will come to find a way forward. Amen.

² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2463