

Be an effective witness to the love of Jesus

Rev'd Balabanski

Ascension b – Acts 1 1-11; Ps 93; Eph 1 15-23; Mk 16 15-20

A colleague of mine – a priest – was out at a local community event when a stranger asked if she had a moment to chat with him privately. As they moved away from the crowd, he said, 'I don't have anything to do with the Church, but I have a couple of questions.' He was very churned up. A good friend of his had died, just a few weeks ago. And now, with the funeral over and a growing sense of emptiness and loneliness, two questions kept plaguing him. His tears started when he asked his questions out loud. 'Where is she now? Is it okay that I keep talking to her?'

They're really important questions. Probably every one of us *will* ask them one day. It's a terribly painful place to be; *Where is s/he? Will s/he hear me if I talk to her/him?* None of us knows for certain. And our unknowing clouds our peace; it unsettles our happiness. You'd have hoped before Jesus' Ascension he might have allowed a little light on our questions. But no, the light is blocked by a cloud. And the cloud of unknowing is a barrier they say only Love can pierce.

Jesus' friends thought they'd lost him forever on Good Friday. But he rose to life again on Easter Day. It was so unexpected that they didn't recognise him until he said their name, or broke bread with them. Today we watch with them as Jesus disappears into the cloud of all our unknowing. Jesus, the one who knows the answer to our hearts' most agonized questions – dead on Friday, alive again on Sunday – and then he leaves us without answering.

Does that mean our questions have failed us? No; they haven't.

They've drawn us to Jesus. They've drawn us to this place where we can strain to see where it is he *does* go. We concentrate on that last glimpse – will we see what others have missed? Maybe we can work out his trajectory. Our questions *must* be answered.

But maybe we concentrate so hard on our questions that we miss what Jesus has said. Let's face it; our priorities and questions aren't often that important. Apart from times when we *have* lost someone precious or when someone we love is deathly ill, our questions can be amazingly trivial – tomorrow's shopping plans; our favourite team; dinner tonight. His disciples were like that too. We saw them today in the Acts reading. They had their resurrected Lord with them, for heaven's sake, and they asked him about politics ... will you get rid of the Romans now?

But even if they *had* asked him the Big Questions – the life and death questions – I think his answer would have been the same. *Jesus replied, 'It's not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. 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*

Poor question: huge answer. Our questions don't fail us. Deep or trivial, they've drawn us to this place where Jesus is. And then he calls us to journey on with him. So we're not given answers to our questions; we're set free from them. We can leave them safely and respectfully at the foot of the Cross. Then, in place of our heavy load of questions, we're given a journey. We are entrusted with a quest that is utterly breathtaking. Our calling is to carry on the ministry of Jesus himself. We're invited to put on his sandals, and journey out to bless the world. *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.*

It's not that our questions have been ignored. Jesus *does* know the pain of our questions. He's lived and died them. There's nothing wrong with our questions? They've done their job. They've brought us to the foot of the Cross. We can leave our questions there and follow Jesus, baptizing and teaching as he commanded.

Our job is to get out of our churches and help people to get to know Jesus. I bang on about this quite a bit; that we all have to get out and tell people about Jesus. It'll take us out of our comfort zone. It's not something we're used to. When we ask the question, 'How's the Church going to continue if young families won't come along?' we seem to be expressing regret and helplessness. I don't get the impression that we're asking for ideas about how we might get personally involved in the renewal. But we must.

Today, let's cry out to our risen, ascended Lord Jesus – way up there somewhere. 'How's your Church going to continue if young families won't come along?' I think Jesus' answer will be the same as it was before his Ascension: *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth.*

We've been blessed with the faith of the resurrection. We can bring our burdens and our limitations to the Cross, and then leave them there to travel on unburdened. We're set free to join in the mysterious journey trodden by all Christians.

Next Sunday is Pentecost – when we will remember how the power of the Holy Spirit dissolved the boundaries of a frightened Church's comfort zone and sent out the most ordinary women and men to bring the freedom of Christ's reign to their neighbours.

Remember that heartbroken man who spoke to my friend; 'Where is she now? Is it okay that I keep talking to her? Please pray this week –*Holy Spirit, make me an effective witness to the*

resurrected Jesus; please use me to help others to bring their questions to him. It's important.' Amen.