

Be an effective witness to the love of Jesus

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Ascension – Acts 1 1-11 Ps 47 Mt 28 16-20

A colleague of mine was out at a local community event. A stranger noticed her collar and 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 recently. And now, with 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 can say for certain. And our un-knowing clouds our peace; it unsettles our happiness. We could wish that before Jesus' Ascension he might have shone a definite light on our questions. But no, the light's blocked by a cloud of unknowing; 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 some friends didn't even recognise him until he said their name, or broke bread with them. Today we watched with them as Jesus disappeared into the cloud of all our unknowing. Jesus, the only one who knows the answer to our hearts' most agonized questions – dead on Friday, alive again on Sunday – he leaves us without answering.

Does that mean our questions have failed us? No; I don't think so. They've drawn us to Jesus. They've drawn us to this

gathering where we strain to see where it is he *does* go. We concentrate on that last glimpse – will we see what others have missed – his trajectory? Our questions *must* be answered. But maybe we concentrate so hard on our questions that we miss what Jesus has actually said.

Let's face it; our priorities and questions often aren't 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; the details of some scandal in the news. His disciples were like that too. They had their resurrected Lord with them ... and they asked him about ... his politics. Now that you've risen from the dead, will you restore the kingdom to Israel – by which they meant, will you get rid of the Romans?

But even if they *had* asked him the Big Questions – the life and death questions – I think his answer would have been the same as his answer to the political question. *Jesus replied, 'It's not for you to know the times or seasons 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.**'* Acts 1.7-8

Poor question: but what an answer! As I said, our questions don't fail us. Deep or trivial, they've drawn us to this place where Jesus is. And then Jesus calls us to journey on with him. And on that journey, 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 calling. We are entrusted with a purpose for our lives that is utterly breathtaking.

Our calling is nothing less than the ministry of Jesus himself. We are invited to put on his sandals, to journey out,

and to bless the world. We heard that majestic call in today's Gospel.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you... . Mt 28.18b-20a

It's not that our questions have been ignored. Our Lord Jesus *does* know the pain of our questions. He's lived and died them – he's dealt with them first hand. No, our questions did their job. They brought us to the foot of the Cross There we can leave them and follow Jesus, baptizing and teaching as he commanded.

That means our job – yours, mine, every one of ours – our job is to help people to get to know Jesus. But how?

Let's bring this question to our risen, ascended Lord Jesus. 'How do we do something like this when it's going to take us so far out of our comfort zones?' I think Jesus' answer will be the same as it was at 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.*

The Holy Spirit comes. Next Sunday is Pentecost – there we'll hear again how the power of the Holy Spirit dissolved the boundaries of a frightened Church's comfort zone and sent ordinary men and women to bring Christ's freedom to their neighbours.

We experience this at Ascension in a particular way It's the moment where we see Jesus leave behind the 'here and now' – the 'there and then' – to be revealed as the Christ we know as 'everywhere and always'. This is the Christ we will experience within and around us because of Pentecost – because of the presence of the Holy Spirit within and among us –the One who

emboldens and strengthens us.

Please pray this over the coming week – *We pray Holy Spirit that we might be an effective witness to the love of Jesus; please help us to make, nurture and love new disciples.*

Pray this please, and let's see what happens at Pentecost.
Amen