

Read Acts 1 verses 1 – 11 *“When he had said this and as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight”* (Verse 9 NRSV)

Dear Friends

The Ascension of Jesus is a difficult concept for us to grasp. What are we to make of the verse and story before us? Those who prefer a literal interpretation of the Bible will want to say that events took place exactly as they are written and translated. Others will want to question whether we are meant to understand this story factually or in terms of its imagery. In the Post-modern world we are all aware that heaven isn't “up there,” so questions arise about where Jesus went if we interpret literally the story Luke sets before us.

To say that the story is one of images is not to deny the truth it conveys. The earthly appearances of the risen Lord Jesus had to come to an end at some stage, and Luke, writing some 40-50 years after the event, is telling his readers how that came to be. In his Gospel account (Luke 9 verses 34-35) the same author uses the image of a cloud to convey the glory of God. Here in Acts, the supernatural and symbolic cloud indicates that the ascension of Jesus is wrapped in the glory and purpose of God.

As Jesus leaves the earthly realm, we are then left with the image of the disciples gazing upwards and wishing he were still with them – or indeed was about to return. Remember Luke is writing to mainly second generation Christians at a time when the hope of Jesus' imminent return was fading. As Luke is about to remind his readers, Christians have a great task to perform before this Jesus “...Will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

At the beginning of the story, the disciples receive their final instructions from Jesus. They are not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. At that point in time, they had no idea how long they would have to wait – they just knew they had to stay together in their own city.

Over the next few days, and using what we know of the characteristics of some of the disciples, I will be reflecting on what those (as it turned out) 10 days of lockdown might have been like for them. And if we can see any of their traits in our own lives as we too struggle with the uncertain times we live in.

Many blessings

Peter