

Luke 24 v 44-53    Acts 1 v 1-11    Daniel 7 v 9-14    Psalm 47

Ascension written by Sarah Ashton

May my feet walk in your way Lord, may my hands do your work Lord, may my mind think of you Lord, may my heart be filled with your Love Lord and may my mouth speak your words Lord. Amen

This must be the one day in the Church Year when the end of one book in the Bible overlaps with the start of another. It is believed that Luke is the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. They are both addressed to Theophilus, who scholars have concluded was either a Roman official, or a man of high position and wealth. It may be that he was Luke's patron, who would be responsible for seeing that the writings were copied and distributed. It was quite common for books to be addressed to the publisher at this time.

However, in this case there is more to it as the Gospel is intended for the instruction of Theophilus too. Theophilus clearly did a good job, as here we are reading it and gaining from Luke's insight two thousand years later.

Our focus for this evening is the words from Luke's Gospel, but his introduction to Acts sets the scene. After Jesus has explained to the people about God through His earthly ministry, He suffered, died on the cross and rose again. For forty days He has been appearing to his disciples, giving them convincing proofs and teaching them about the Kingdom of God. He gives them the firm instruction that they are not to leave Jerusalem until they receive the promised gift from God; the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Once again, the disciples are not quite sure what they are expecting. If I am told that someone has a gift for me I become excited and my mind goes off in all sorts of directions wondering what it might be. I am not the sort of person who goes looking or tries to find out what the gift is, but I feel impatient and want to know.

The disciples want to know what they are expecting. Even though they have been told it is God's Spirit they question whether a new political order is going to be introduced. Many people in Jerusalem at the time wanted the Roman rule to cease; they wanted a new political order. They wanted a new kingdom, but were not really expecting God's Kingdom, they wanted an earthly not a spiritual change.

In The Gospel Jesus explains to them that everything that is written about Him in the three parts of the Hebrew Old Testament known as The Law of Moses, The Prophets and The Psalms, needs to be fulfilled. He opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptural teaching. Jesus stresses that they are the witnesses to His life, death and resurrection. To be a witness carries a responsibility and the disciples must be struggling to understand where Jesus is coming from. As a human being, if someone you loved has been taken away from you and then returns you want to hang on to them all the more. Jesus had amazed them by rising from the dead and had comforted them, reassured them and taught them for the following forty days; they were confident of His presence but now it is all going to change again. They are promised a gift from God: a gift that will help them bring about God's kingdom.

Then he quietly takes them on the short journey to the vicinity of Bethany and lifts his hands and blesses them; an everyday event, but this time whilst He is blessing them He disappears into heaven. There is no panic amongst the disciples; they worshipped Jesus and then returned to Jerusalem full of joy, and used one of the Temple rooms to continually praise God.

In Acts it says that a cloud hid him from their sight and that two men dressed in white, like the ones the women saw at the empty tomb, were there and they reassured the disciples that Jesus would return. They know that they have to remain in Jerusalem and wait for God's gift, it was the last instruction that Jesus gave them.

The text tells us that they are happy. At last they all understand that although Jesus is gone from their sight, He is still with them and through the Holy Spirit, which we know will arrive in ten days time in the form of a rushing mighty wind and tongues of fire, they can be confident of God's presence in their lives. They can continue to preach and tell people of Jesus and of God's love for the world. They know that God is with them, even though they have seen Him go.

As I said at the beginning, this is an account that has lasted two thousand years. We are here in person, or watching a streamed version, because we too want to know Jesus and God's love for us. We have not had the benefit of physically walking with and hearing Jesus, but we have the accounts of his followers and the gift of the Holy Spirit to support us; through them we can

know Jesus personally. Jesus may have been taken from their sight but he lived in their hearts and they were filled with great joy.

Just a little knowledge of physics tells us that what goes up, must come down. It is not just God's kingdom on earth that we are able to participate in but also the promise of His second coming!

As we remember Jesus' ascension into heaven to be re-united with God the Father, may we be filled with great joy and ready to share the marvellous story with those around us.