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**StAG’s NEWSLETTER**

**May/June 2024**

Dear All,

Jesus died for us... so we know we are loved!

This week I have been learning more about Philip, in preparation for a discussion with Jacob on Sunday! Philip was a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian who travelled to Samaria (far northern israel) and Gaza (far south), around 300 miles of walking, as he passed on to people the message of Christ. That’s a fair distance without transport! And it makes me realise how nowadays we think that distance is simply a big day’s journey for a tank! It is hard to believe that the news we see on our screens is taking place on the same soil where Jesus and His disciples walked. Our prayers are needed so much, and connecting them to our Bible ‘stories’ helps me to focus! Our prayers are needed so much!

**On the third day, He rose again, He ascended into heaven…**

Any football supporters reading? If your team were to win the FA Cup, for how long would you celebrate? If your country were to win the World Cup, for how long would you talk about that?

For us Christians, our ‘hero’ – Jesus – did something which we are still talking about 2000 years later. He rose again, which we celebrate at Easter. Traditionally, the Easter season lasts for 50 days (7 Sundays).

Before we rush on to celebrate, let us not forget the Ascension.

Luke recorded it twice. Firstly and briefly, in Luke 24:50-53; secondly and more fully, in Acts 1:1-11.

This year, the Sunday Lectionary omits the Ascension, hence the reason why I am mentioning in this pastoral letter.

Before you continue to read, please take a moment to read the accounts of Ascension in the Bible.

On one level, we can look at the Ascension as a farewell event. If we go to any railway station or airport, we will see many people saying goodbye: some for a short time, others for much longer; and others still for whom it is probably farewell forever.

This man, this Jesus, whom the Disciples had lost once when He was crucified, they are losing Him again. The human emotions of painful separation and grief in the story are palpable.

And into this fragile human moment, God acts supernaturally: Jesus is taken up into Heaven and became hidden from their sight.

While reflecting and writing this sermon, it occurred to me that in Bolton – like in many places around the world - we have a wonderful example and a very real metaphor for the meaning of the Ascension.

Winter Hill the highest point in Greater Manchester and on top of it stands this huge TV transmitter Some days, one can see Winter Hill clearly; sometimes, the top of the mast is hidden in cloud.

Why mention this? The TV signals which come from the Winter Hill transmitter, they are there whatever the weather, even if we cannot see the transmitter itself because it is obscured in cloud. And so it is with Jesus in the Ascension: He disappeared from their sight into the clouds, and even though we cannot see Him, His presence remains with us.

The 20th Century theologian, Karl Barth, called the Ascension “an historical turning point”.The Ascension is Jesus re-gathering His followers. Jesus did not choose learned or powerful people to be His Disciples: He chose every day, working people; He chose the outcasts; He chose us.

In Jesus’ last conversation with His Disciples, their goals are still earthly: they ask him about the restoration of Israel, a political goal. Jesus broadens their horizons and commissions them to continue His work.

In today’s reading, did you spot the appearance of angels? When we read the Gospels which tell the story of Jesus’ time on Earth, angels appear at key moments to guide the humans on their next step when confronted with God’s powerful actions. The angels tell them that Jesus will return! The Disciples needed a nudge, for they were staring into the sky. The angels speak to them, assure them and they begin their descent of the mountain to begin Christ’s Church.

And at that moment, there on that mountain top, it all begins.The Ascension is about Jesus is completing His journey and us beginning ours. Jesus becomes human, is born as a baby, lives His life, is tried and executed. He rises from the dead, and in the Ascension, Jesus is going home.

Jesus, who is both fully Divine and fully human, in the Ascension forever changes the doorway between Earth and Heaven. Jesus, a human-being, entered heaven! That is the amazing mystery of the Ascension: a human-being entered glory and is with God. And because Jesus did, we can, too!

*Revd. Walt Johnson, Minister in the Bolton & Salford Missional Partnership*

**Thursday Friendship Circle dates**

May 2nd TBA

 16th Elizabeth MacKinnon

 30th Jill Edisbury

June 13th Walk from Joyce’s to lunch at Regent Park Golf Club

 27th Bridgewater Gardens ?

**Preaching parties?** (from Reform magazine, April 2024)

The Rev. Jackie Embrey, a retired URC minister, is the new host of the Joint Public Issues Team’s Politics in the Pulpit? podcast. Each week Jackie will be joined by a guest to discuss the forthcoming week’s lectionary resource in a way that equips preachers and worship leaders to unpack justice and peace issues in the pulpit. For more on this, see [**www.jpit.uk/politicsinthepulpit**](http://www.jpit.uk/politicsinthepulpit)

**Preachers:**

28-4 Rev Jim Hollyman

5-5 Mr Derek Estill

12-5 Rev Tony Burnham

19-5 Rev Walt Johnson

26-5 Mrs Linda Gillett

2-6 Mrs Gill Dascombe

9-6 Mrs Dorothy Holland

16-6 Rev Walt Johnson

23-6 Rev Peter Wightman

30-6 No service, Ironman event

7-7 Mr Leo Roberts

**Family News**

It was so good to be able to join with Victoria Hall when our minister for last week’s service was ill. Thank you! We have recently heard that Colin Smith has died and we send our love to his family. He served for many years as a member of our choir, then moved to Greenmount URC. There has been at least one special birthday recently! Congratulations, J! Hoping it really was a special occasion! We would like to pass on our love and best wishes to Phil Swarsbrick and also Philomena (lately of the Day Centre) who are both suffering severe health issues.

Shalom.