

## Communion Service Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May – led by Revd. David Aplin



*In our churches we tended to very much underplay the importance of Ascension. We all knew that the most important day in the year of the Church was Easter Day, when our Lord had been resurrected, when He'd come back to life. And David was to show us that it wasn't the only important thing; that Ascension was absolutely vital for the future of our souls in the Kingdom of God.*

**The Ascension Story** in Acts was covered in a single verse. As the disciples watched, Jesus had been lifted up, and a cloud had taken him out of their sight. In one sense, that was the whole story of the Ascension. Yet there was far more to it than that. The whole story of Jesus Christ was extraordinary. David hesitated to call it unbelievable, because it was a story we were called to believe. And when we reflected on it, we might well ask: which part was the most astonishing?

We might think first of the virgin conception and the birth of the Christ child in Bethlehem, the city of David. Yet the story of Jesus' early life was, in many ways, wonderfully ordinary. He'd lived quietly and worked as a carpenter until the age of thirty. Then, after his baptism by John, his public ministry had begun, and the Gospels told us all that followed: his teaching, his healing, his compassion, and his power. He was recognised as the Christ, and yet he was also cruelly crucified, dead, and buried. His resurrection was truly astonishing, and then, at the close of his earthly ministry, he'd ascended into heaven. That too was absolutely incredible.

Where had he gone? We were not left without an answer. We *did* know where he had gone, and why. John's Gospel began with these words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Christ came from the Father, and in the Ascension he'd returned to the Father.

The Son had entered our world because humanity had again and again turned away from God, falling into false worship and evil. So the Father had sent the Son, who'd humbled himself to become fully human. In his earthly life, Jesus had embraced the reality of our human condition. He'd prayed, trusted, and obeyed. If miracles had been done, they had been done in dependence upon the Father and through the Spirit. And when his earthly work was complete, he'd not remained on earth to grow old; he'd ascended to the Father's house, and his earthly life had reached its fulfilment in glory.

### **What the Ascension Meant for Us**

First, the Ascension pointed us to eternal life. Jesus had shown us the way to the Father's home. Our bodies were mortal, but our souls belonged to God and were called onward into his life. This was not an abstract idea; it mattered personally to every one of us.

Second, the Ascension mattered for this life as well. God had given us the freedom to choose between right and wrong, good and evil. He did not force our obedience. We were free, and with that freedom came responsibility. Yet God had not left us alone in our weakness: he'd given us the help of the Holy Spirit.

While he was on earth, Jesus had taught us how to pray. He'd given us the Lord's Prayer, and throughout his ministry he'd showed us by his own example a life lived in communion with the Father. Because of the Spirit he'd given us, we could turn to God in every season of life. Our prayers did not need to be complicated; they could be as simple and honest as:

- "Please, God, help me."
- "Thank you, Lord."
- "I am sorry, Lord."

Such prayers had been enough for Jesus in his earthly life, and they were enough for us now. God listened, and the Spirit was at work.