

Ascension Day 14th May 2026

Acts 1: 1-11. Ephesians 1: 15-23. Luke 24: 44-53

What Now?

The disciples, as we read in both of Luke's descriptions of the Ascension, in his gospel and in his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, had witnessed the ascension of Jesus.

The man they had followed, had struggled to understand, had loved and been loved back, was gone from them a second time. The first time was traumatic. A painful death on a cross, reserved for people who rebelled against the Roman Empire's authority. An unjust and violent death for a man who showed compassion and love to all he met. In the immediate aftermath of Jesus's death the disciples were understandably frightened and hid in the upper room, unable to do anything constructive or meaningful. They were prisoners to their own thoughts and fears. Shut down and temporarily lacking in vision and plan for what to do next.

Then, the totally unexpected happened. Jesus appeared to them, talked and ate with them, and gave them further examples of what God's kingdom on earth should look like.

Forty days on since Jesus' resurrection, and Jesus left the disciples for a second time. The disciples were about to become apostles, a change of name to signify they had moved from being pupils to being equipped to be sent out to spread the good news.

This time the disciples were not afraid. They were not frightened. They were not paralysed to the point of inaction, even though Jesus told them they would not see Him on earth again. What a contrast to forty days before.

As they stood there, without Jesus, you can imagine the conversation amongst them. ‘What now?’ may have been heard. ‘What now’, indeed! It seems as if they all understood what they must do. This band of the most unlikely ‘A Team’ members you could hardly have imagined knew exactly what to do.

Jesus had told them that they were to stay in Jerusalem *‘until you have been clothed with power from on high’*. He didn’t say what they should do whilst waiting. Jesus didn’t say how long they would have to wait.

The disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy, Luke tells us. And Luke then tells us what they did. They were continually in the temple blessing God. Can you imagine what the disciples may have actually have been doing? What we know of Jewish temple practices would lead us to believe that the disciples would have been in the temple praying. Praying for what turned out to be nine full days, until the promised Holy Spirit came to earth.

The Thy Kingdom Come initiative, run by the Church of England, and now widespread across the Anglican Communion, encourages us to pray over these nine days. What our Roman Catholic friends call a Novena. And there is a focus to these prayers over the nine days. We are asked to pray for up to five different people. These may include:

- ✝ To pray for someone whose faith is possibly wavering;
- ✝ To pray for someone not currently of faith;
- ✝ To pray for someone who has had a difficult time during the last year, and may be saying to themselves, ‘what now?’, seeking to write a new chapter in their lives.
- ✝ To pray for someone for a reason you cannot fathom but the Holy Spirit has guided you to think of them.

And what shall we pray? Given our recent gospel readings, I would like to suggest that we pray that God may abide in them and that they abide in God. That they may know the love and compassion of Jesus. That they may feel enveloped in the care of the Holy Spirit. And I also suggest using these words from Psalm 122; 'peace be within you', and also pray, 'I will seek your good'.

I ask you to pray over these nine days for the same person or people each day.

And if you are stuck for words, simply use this prayer;

*Come, Holy Spirit, and fill us with overflowing joy;
Give (name of the person) a sense of your unexpected presence.
Amen.*

Prayer does not need to be full of clever words, especially when we are alone praying to our creator God. We can settle in the comforting presence of God in companionable silence. We can clear our minds of all the busy chatter and seek God in the silence. We can ask God to prompt us for who we are asked to pray for, or we may have someone on our minds already. We can slowly and intentionally say the prayer, confident in what we pray. When our prayer is aligned with God's desires, all sorts of wonderful things can unfold.

In a short time of silence, I ask you to pray, and to invite the Holy Spirit to abide within you, to listen, and discern if God is placing someone to pray for in your heart.