

WEEKLY SERMON

communicate@blackburn.anglican.org



How do we respond to God's blessings?

Luke 24: 51-3: While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

At this time of the year, some of us remember Jesus' Ascension into heaven with special services and prayers, but many people are unaware of what Ascension is about these days.

That's rather sad, because the Ascension has important things to say to all of us about Jesus and about our own ministry, whatever and wherever that might be.

First, Jesus blessed his disciples. When we are worried about the future, personal or political, we often forget how blessed we are.

That doesn't mean we aren't allowed to be concerned about things – being told to 'count your blessings' when life is difficult isn't very helpful.

But we can be confident that, however hard things might be, God loves us, and wants the best for us, and is with us in the hard times, just as Jesus shared our human suffering. It's significant that, even as Jesus withdrew from his disciples and his earthly life, he was still blessing, and continues to do so.

Second, the disciples responded to Jesus' blessing with worship, with joy and by blessing God. How do we respond to God's blessings, to God's love for us? Do we worship and praise God, and show joy in our faith?

The **third** thing is that the disciples obeyed Jesus. They went back to Jerusalem to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in the book of Acts; Mark's gospel also tells us that they obeyed Jesus by telling people about him and by doing God's work.

Jesus had already told them 'you will not always have me with you' and now that had become reality; it was down to the disciples both to spread the word about him and, equally important, to be a blessing to others.

We are undoubtedly not the only people aware that we are living in difficult times, but we have the advantage of knowing that we are blessed in having a God who cares about us. Wherever we are – at work, in our communities, in our churches and homes – we can try to share that blessing with others in everything we say and do.

Mandy Stanton,
Lay Leadership Officer

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