

ASCENSION 2020

People of Galilee, why do you stand and look to heaven? Jesus has been taken from you up into Heaven.

In reality, if I had been there I'm sure I too would have been looking to heaven. Something that extraordinary requires at least a second look. It is not a sight you come across every day. Where did he go? Is it a trick of our eyes? Will he come right back? Previously the disciples had experienced Jesus' death, resurrection and post-resurrection appearances. Now this! All of these were outside any normal experience – no wonder they were confused.

But what now? They are asking - where do we go – what do we do – what is next?

I am reminded of the old adage that when one door closes, another opens for us. The question becomes – how long will we stand looking at the closed door – hoping it will reopen on its own or trying to unlock it ourselves. These are futile attempts to recapture the past and refuse the present and deny the future. That door will not open again to what has gone before. We can only go forward. The future will be much richer but it can be so hard to take that first step, that leap into the unknown. To embrace the new without the regret for the past.

Separation from the previous does not need to be a loss – relationships and contacts can continue. This has never been clearer than in our present time of social distancing. Physical separation does not remove someone from our lives, our minds, our hearts or our love. We were all taken by surprise by the restrictions COVID placed on us. It came suddenly with no exceptions. It thrust us into the unknown without a road map. Nothing in the past prepared us for this. Even now the question of how long will it last has no answer. In today's world,

technology keeps us in touch with business and personal relationships. While this has been different and difficult for many, it is hard to picture how it would have been without Zoom, Facebook and conference calls.

There were no such solutions for the disciples. They watched Jesus ascend and there was not going to be any return in human form. They believed it to be over. Only the memories and the teachings were left and they would be called upon to spread those words to the world.

Even with all that had occurred and the uncertainty of the future, Luke tells us that the apostles returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. They went to the temple and prayed and worshipped God. Jesus had promised to send the Holy Spirit and they believed it would happen. A Spirit that would connect them to heaven – to God and Jesus.

People of Galilee – why do you look to heaven – what now – what is next? People of today – where do you look?

There is always a chance and a choice for what comes next. Have there been positives or only negatives in the past few months? Do we huddle in an upper room or do we praise God? Are we uncertain or grateful? Do we isolate or reach out in love? Have we found new ways to connect? Are churches just buildings or are they community?

God has not and will not forget us. While we look to heaven let us not forget our blessings on earth.