

Christchurch, Forest of Dean, Sunday after Ascension, 24th May 2020

Based on Acts 1, verses 3 - 11a

Do you know the plant Himalayan Balsam? If you knock the seed-heads they explode in all directions.

But first a true story.

When our children were very small, en route for a Scottish holiday, we stopped at a Motorway Services place on the M6, patronising for the first time a "Little Chef". We ordered and soon a tall young waitress (they had them back in those days!) brought our food.

As we ended our meal we realised that Ralph, aged 5, had disappeared. Gone. In a Motorway service area. No explanation. We were frantic...

Then we saw him with his arms round the legs of the waitress, holding her tight and looking up to her, saying, "Thank you for my nice dinner". She had tears in her eyes...

Ralph's innocent words meant so much to her. Made her day.

Today's Bible Reading told of Christ's Ascension.

It's the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and the beginning of the Christian Church.

St. Luke wrote the Book of Acts as well as his Gospel.

His **Gospel** keeps returning to the Temple - for Jesus' naming, then his 12 years old teaching the Elders and so on throughout his gospel. It always pulls back to that Temple centre. His Gospel even ends with,

"They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy, and were continually in the Temple, praising God".

But **in the Book of Acts** things **start** at the Jerusalem Temple and then **explode outwards** to Judaea, Samaria, Rome and beyond: journeys **in faith**.

Luke's **Gospel** is all about **building up** the group of disciples.

And the **Book of Acts** has that group being **shot out from the centre**.

Bit like the himalayan balsam - a great shower of seeds going in all directions.

And the hinge-point is Christ's Ascension:

the **inward-looking** Jesus-people go outwards on a **mission to the world**.

Up until then their lives had been centred on Jesus.

After Christ's Ascension, they wait and receive the promised Holy Spirit, which empowers them to go out in ministry.

And the truth for **us** right now, in lockdown,

is that **we are commissioned** to work out **our** ministry - right where we are.

After Jesus' Ascension it would have been easy for the disciples to feel isolated, abandoned or alone.

It would be easy for **us** at present to feel like that -

- "What can **we** do, we can't even go to church on Sunday?"

But, amazingly, we are the mission of the **front line** of the church.

We have to look outwards, just as we are.

Think how many times in church you've been commanded,

"Go in peace to love and serve the Lord".

This now is our **worship-service**, and we will declare, "We are the Body of Christ" - and you know St Theresa said, "Christ has no body on earth but *yours... yours* are the hands with through which he blesses the world... *yours* are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on the world....."

So as soon as you've switched off your computer this morning, your **mission-service** begins.

"But, Robin, **how?** We're in lockdown."

Well, and you're doing this already - **FIRST** pray for your friends and family everyday - and ring them up and **tell them you're doing it**. Get on the phone, hear their stories, what they need prayer about.

SECOND, Write letters or send postcards. You know how thrilled you are to get a personal hand-written letter through your letter-box. E-mails are all very well, but the hand-written letter that can be read again and again, (even in bed!), means so much more.

And you've got plenty of time now. So **write letters or cards**.

THIRD When you do go out for your permitted weekly shopping trip, keeping your distance, do **look at** the shelf-stacker in the Co-Op, or the checkout girl in Tesco, really look, **look them in the eye and say something appreciative**. It might just be, "Thank you so much for doing this for us". But do it. It's your mission. Showing respect, showing care, showing love. In Christ's name. Remember my little lad and the waitress, "Thank you for my nice dinner". That made her day, because nobody stops to say Thank-you in a fast food place.

So here we are today, receiving Christ in the Bread and the Wine, ...to become **His** Body... for **His** people... in **His** world. So pray... phone....write...and look right in the eye.

We are the Body of Christ.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.