21-27 May 2023 Gone but not forgotten

Acts 1:6-14

**6**Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

**7**He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.**8**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

**9**After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

**10**They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. **11**“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

### Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

**12**Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+1%3A6-14&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26936a)] from the city. **13**When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. **14**They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

**Bible notes**

John 17 bridges the extended meditations (chapters 13-16) on the meaning of Jesus’ ‘hour’ as he leaves the world for his heavenly Father (v.1; cf. 13:1), and the account in chapters 18-20 of the way in which this happens. Chapter 17 is sometimes called Jesus’ ‘high priestly prayer’, as if to suggest that his life is laid down as a sacrificial offering, not taken from him to satisfy a momentary political expediency (10:18; 11:47-53). There are echoes of the Lord’s Prayer here, also the ‘descent/ascent’ motif of this Gospel (e.g. 1:1, 14; 12:23-32). For John, Jesus’ passion is not a shameful end but a glorious turning point in the story of the world’s salvation.

Jesus prays for himself in verse 1, but his eyes are fixed on his Father’s glory. As in life, so in death he honours his heavenly Father. Leaving his disciples does not mean forgetting them. He asks that his exaltation to God’s heavenly house (14:2) will bless and strengthen them with the knowledge and faith they have received from him (vv.7-8). And he prays for their protection and unity in the face of their enemies’ hostility (16:1ff; cf. 1:10-11).

Looking backwards and forwards in the narrative, we see Jesus’ prayer being answered in the coming of the Holy Spirit to the community that lives by his commandment (14:3,16-31; 15:26; 20:22). The Spirit will show that God does not abandon him to the shame of his passion, but vindicates all that he has lived and died for (16:7-15). The disciples will be reassured that though he has gone from them, neither he nor they are forgotten. They will not be abandoned like orphans (14:18ff). And his teaching will find fresh meaning (16:12-15), as they abide in the love that flows between Father and Son (14:23; 15:1ff).

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

The challenge that was given to the disciples at the ascension was: don’t get fixated on Christ’s going but prepare for his return by fulfilling his mission. In other words, when things change don’t get lost in the past. It is something we must all learn post-Covid. We need to discover new ways of being church. Yes, adjustment is not always comfortable, but the ministry of the ‘comforter’ is not to soothe us, but to encourage and strengthen us in our calling. We need to determine what to let go, what to adapt and what to do new. The Spirit, Jesus’ leaving gift to us, will supply the wisdom and courage for that task

**Questions for reflection**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Click on the image to view a larger version  or use the *Jump menu* to go to *This week's images*.  For artist's details, see [this issue's illustrators.](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2023/125-may-june-2023-a/issue-125-illustrators) |     **Questions**   * What is happening here? * How do things change for the disciples once Jesus has ascended into heaven? * Can you identify a turning point in your own life? |  |

Prayer

### A prayer of thanksgiving

Thank you, O God,   
that your wisdom is way beyond our imagining,   
for we humans make such a mess of things,   
we yearn so often for the here and the now, for the easy ways;  
but thank you, God, that you see beyond the here and now  
and are not tempted by our easy options.

Thank you that when we set our eyes on the wrong things,   
you gently divert our vision to see what you would have us see.

Thank you that when we hear something that sounds more pleasing to us,   
your Word remains strong, steadfast and secure  
no matter what we do and seek to do.

Thank you for Scriptures that tell your story though the ages,  
for the prophets and teachers who bring you to life for us,  
who reveal your being to us.

Thank goodness, O God,   
that today and every day   
you are there, are here, for us.   
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Send us out, O Lord,  
waiting expectantly for your Spirit,  
looking for signs of your presence with us,  
looking for signs of your work in action.  
Support us, strengthen us, establish us,  
now and in all the weeks to come,  
that we may show your glory,  
and know your blessing and peace.   
**Amen.**