

Rachel writes . . .

I noticed on Facebook that three priests I know who live further south in England had used their time off after Easter to take holidays in the Peak District. Of course, there are many parts of the UK that have spectacular countryside and lots of history, so our corner of the country is not unique in that aspect, but I often remark to people that we are very blessed to live in Derbyshire.

One of the customs that still exists in Derbyshire is Well Dressing. An Internet search told me that Well Dressing has a long history that predates its Christian connection, possibly beginning as a Roman or Celtic offering to ensure clean and reliable water, but it noted that by the nineteenth century Well Dressing was the tradition we still have today, with wells and other sources of water being decorated with elaborate mosaics with Christian themes using flower petals, moss and other natural materials. Apparently the birthplace of the modern tradition is Tissington, which begins its Well Dressings on Ascension Day each year.

Ascension Day is one of those days in the Church's calendar that might pass unnoticed by a lot of people because it is always on a Thursday, forty days after Easter Day, and ten days before the great feast of Pentecost, when we remember how Jesus' disciples received the Holy Spirit and were empowered to start spreading the Gospel.

When services are held to mark Ascension Day, they are usually outside at sunrise. By the middle of May the sunrise is very early - around 5am. It has been some years since a sunrise service has been held in our parishes (as far as I know), but I try to go to one of our Church schools and have an outdoor service - although it's usually at 9am rather than 5am!

When I was at theological college in West Yorkshire, there was a tradition for the 'College Child' (the youngest student) to get up before sunrise and run around the college banging on people's doors and shouting (from Psalm 47):

*God has gone up with a shout, The LORD with the sound of a trumpet!*

This emphasis on marking the day at sunrise is not going to appeal to everyone - and the banging and shouting at college didn't endear the College Child to the rest of us! We were somewhat mollified by the promise of a cooked breakfast after Morning Prayer though - a treat reserved for feast days. We were even allowed to talk to each other - on regular days we had to eat our breakfast in silence.

As I already noted, Ascension Day is easy to miss because it falls on a weekday, but should you remember to mark the day, I encourage you to stop and look up at the sky, as the disciples did, and give thanks for Jesus' ministry on earth.

Blessings,

Rachel CJN