**When we think of Joyful Christian celebrations, I would say Christmas and Easter would be mentioned. Maybe Harvest?**

**Today’s Celebration**

**40 days after Easter we celebrate Ascension and the 50 days after Easter, we celebrate Pentecost. Therefore today (although Ascension Day was Thursday 21st May) we consider Ascension, and next week Pentecost.**

About 30 years ago our telephone rang at 5.00am, it was the Sunday morning when we would celebrate Ascension in our churches. A man on the phone asked how can we believe that Jesus was taken up in a cloud? And stated how ridiculous it was to think that God sat on a cloud and looked down on us. We had quite a long discussion of how events are described in the bible, and when you are describing something you use visual aspects that are known to a person and that day. Luke described the ascension of Jesus the best way he could, - ‘*a cloud took him out of their site*’. This in turn had been described to Luke, as he later became an Apostle through Paul’s teaching. He then went on to accompany Paul in his ministry. (Next week we will here of how he describes the day of Pentecost)

**We could ask, “What is the purpose of believing in this? Why should we believe?”**

There had to be a final moment for Jesus on earth, he had to go back to his Father and claim his rightful place. The 40 days after resurrection had been a unique time, but it could not go on for ever and something definite had to happen. Jesus’ resurrection appearances could not just peter out.

We do have to transport our imaginations back to the time when this happened. Nowadays we do not regard heaven as some place beyond the sky: we regard it as a state of sacredness when we will be forever with God. Every person, even the wisest in those days thought of the earth as flat and of heaven above the sky. If Jesus was to give his disciples unanswerable proof that he had returned to glory, then it had to happen this way. In spite of this the disciples returned to Jerusalem with joy (Luke recalls in his Gospel), thus showing that the disciples were truly understanding that he had not left them and his promise of being with them always was coming to fruition.

On the feast of the Ascension, we are called to rejoice and celebrate both in Jesus’ victory over sin and death (his crucifixion and resurrection) and in the glorious life that he has secured for us (as he ascended to heaven).

**I would say, through this we can have and experience hope.**

As Christians, our hope is secure because it rests in Jesus’ death and resurrection. Through Jesus we have been reconciled to God. We are no longer strangers. Every day, we can live in confidence, knowing that our God is with us to strengthen and comfort us.

Our hope is also founded in the inheritance Jesus won for us—none other than being with our Father forever, knowing him intimately, in all his splendour and beauty. In his ascension, Jesus has opened the door for us. We are redeemed. We are now fully loved and accepted as God’s children, and we will live with him forever.

As we live every day in the hope of our eternal inheritance, however, we can begin to taste these blessings here and now. This is part of the “immeasurable greatness of his power in those who believe.” Before he returned to his Father, Jesus prayed for his disciples. He prays for the work the disciples are about to do, the burdens they will carry on his behalf. The love they will show in their actions and their work, the miracles they will carry out in the name of God, and the persecution they will endure. We need to know that in this he eternally prays for us and all we go through in life as he is with us.

***The disciples were to become true witnesses to Jesus, as others have when they have heard about and read the accounts of Jesus; and believed.***

Today the 24th May is Wesley Day – I know this because on my birthday my Brother -in-Law – a Methodist Minister, reminds me.

24th May is as close as you get to a holy day in Methodism, because 24th May 1738 was the day on which John Wesley’s heart was ‘strangely warmed.’ 24th May does not commemorate a birth or a death, but a spiritual experience

*John Wesley was a man of immense spiritual and mental energies, but up to now these had been mostly directed upon himself, brooding upon the state of his soul and trying to improve it. Now these energies were released, and directed outward to others, who stood in need of the same liberation he had himself received. No longer was personal salvation for himself his all-absorbing aim. In fact, he virtually forgot it in his enterprise to bring salvation to others. He became a true witness.*

When Stanley had discovered Livingstone in Central Africa and had spent some time with him, he said, “If I had been with him any longer I would have been compelled to become a Christian and he never spoke to me about it at all.” *The witness of the man’s life was irresistible.*

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, we rejoice and celebrate today in your ascension to the Father’s right hand. Thank you, Lord, for offering us a share in your heavenly life. By your Spirit, help us to accept your glory, be witnesses for you in word and deed experiencing the hope we have in you.

Be with us for evermore.

Amen