

Acts 1:1-11.

What a rollercoaster of a journey the disciples had been on ever since Jesus had entered Jerusalem, for the final time, on what we now refer to as Palm Sunday.

It had all started so well. As the crowds turned out in their hundreds to welcome Jesus, singing at the top of their voices, hosanna to the son of David, the disciples must have been **elated**. They must have thought that they were on the verge of something really special.

Little did they know that in a matter of just five short days, their master would be arrested and crucified. The death of Jesus left them so **deflated**. Despite all the warnings that Jesus had tried to give them, they did not anticipate his death, and they were totally unprepared for it. They were left shocked and bewildered, uncertain of what to do next.

But just three short days later, when the penny finally dropped, that Jesus really had risen from the dead they were **elated** once again. As they thought about all that had happened, they must have been amazed, aware that they had witnessed something truly special, something significant and something unique, after all, dead men do not normally come back to life again; it was something that literally changed the course of history. Surely now, Jesus would rightly be crowned king.

But then this amazing story took yet another twist. Jesus began to teach them that he was not actually planning on stopping around, but instead he was about to return to his father and leaving the disciples with the task of telling everyone about all that had happened to him. I'm sure that they just could not believe it; but perhaps with Jesus around they were, by now, used to the unexpected! Once again, they must have been left feeling **deflated**.

Not only that, but I'm also sure that they must have been **daunted** by size of the task that Jesus was asking them to do. How could this small group of just twelve disciples, be witnesses to everyone in Jerusalem concerning all that God had done through Jesus? And as if that was not hard enough, Jesus also expected them to take the message to Samara as well. Their hearts must have sunk when they heard this news. We should not forget the fact that the rivalry between these two groups normally meant that they would not even talk to one another. But even that was not the full extent of what Jesus was expecting from them,

they also had to take the message to the ends of the earth. Jesus clearly had enormous expectations.

How could the disciples possibly do all that? They had had no formal education and they certainly had not been to theological college! Neither did they have all the resources they were going to need for the task either, like sufficient money, for example.

But Jesus was well aware that they could not achieve all that he was asking them to do. He knew that it was well beyond their capability and he wasn't expecting them to do it in their own strength. He knew that once he had returned to the father, he would be able to send help to them. So, he told them to wait, until they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, who would empower and equip them in a remarkable way for the tasks ahead.

So once Jesus had ascended to heaven that is exactly what they did. We find them altogether once again in the upper room, obeying Jesus' instruction to wait. In all honesty they were probably not really sure exactly what they were waiting for, or how this special gift was going to arrive. And as we will see next Sunday, they were once again in for big a surprise, resulting in them being **elated** once again. But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves, more about that next week, on Pentecost Sunday.

What has all this got to do with us? As we review the state of the church in our country today perhaps you like the disciples are **deflated** and **daunted** by the size of the task that we face in trying to witness to our faith in the resurrection.

Let's be honest, for a moment. the church in our country has been in decline for many years and is probably at the weakest it has been for many generations. Over the years we have seen many churches close. I remember as a youngster growing up in Stapleford that there were at least six Methodist churches, not to mention four other denominations, now there is just one. We are increasingly seen as irrelevant. Young people are leaving in their droves. Like Gideon in Judges six, we are right to cry out to the Lord, if you are with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about?

Of course, there are many reasons why this has happened but the highly publicized divisions and scandals we have seen, have certainly not helped. Nor has the failure of some of our leaders to believe the gospel accounts. Add to this our failure to welcome those from other cultures, and our failure to speak up

for biblical principles when confronted by the increasingly secular agenda, which has resulted in the decline in moral standards that has dominated the past forty years or so. No wonder people have not wanted to know.

But despite all of this God has not finished with his people, he is still at work. As we know nothing is impossible for him. We still have good news to share, which is just as relevant as it always has been, if not more so. Even a causal reading of church history would indicate that the situation we are facing today is in fact not new. Prior to every great revival the church has experienced it has been preceded by a significant period of decline. God has a proven track record of preserving a remnant and using them to bring fresh life and hope. This is a pattern we see repeated numerous times in the bible.

Just as the disciples could not fulfil the task that God was calling them to do in their own strength, neither can we. I know that before the pandemic many of us were feeling weary from all that you were involved in, many of these things were not wrong in themselves. In Zechariah chapter 4 verse 6 the prophet says, not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord. This verse reminds us, that human effort on its own, is insufficient to achieve Gods' purposes and result in the transformation of our society.

The decade of Evangelism, which many people put a lot of time and effort into resulted in some people coming to faith and joining the church, but it has not stemmed the tide of decline in the church in our country. Only a fresh outpouring of the Spirit will result in a significant transformation taking place in our society.

That is why I believe the Archbishop of Canterbury's initiative, thy kingdom come is so important in calling us all to pray and wait on God, during the 10 days between the Ascension and Pentecost, for a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which will once again, equip and empower his people for the task of witnessing to God's saving love. There are no shortcuts, prayer is the key to releasing God's blessing.

I'm really looking forward to joining over a thousand others next Friday evening from all over the city for a time of prayer. In previous years these have been inspirational evenings. Judith has already sent details out about this earlier in the week. It is not too late to join in. in fact it has never been easier as this year it is online so you to join in from the comfort of your home.

I believe it is an exciting time to be part of the church, it certainly not all doom and gloom, as we wait to see what God will do next. My prayer is that God will once again restore the honour of his name. that in our day once again we will see church full of people praising God for his love. I'm sure like the disciples we will be in for some big surprises.