

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

What an odd bunch we Christians often are. We call the day of Jesus's crucifixion Good Friday and one of our most joyful festivals celebrates the day when Jesus disappeared. After a 40-day tour of his favourite places and pastimes (who doesn't like a good walk or a picnic on the beach?) Jesus returns to the Father. It's the closing bars of the encore, the end of the lap of honour.

So why do we celebrate this great going away? Why isn't this the sad remembrance of when we got left in the lurch? The answer lies not in today's readings but in the first leg of Jesus' post-resurrection tour, when he meets Mary Magdalen on the very dawn of the resurrection. Mary is overwhelmed with Joy to see Jesus, but Jesus has two things to say to her: do not hold onto me; and 'go and tell my brothers'. The resurrection is not something that can be contained. Jesus is not something we can keep hold of for ourselves. Do not hold onto me – go and tell.

So, the Ascension is not a celebration of Jesus leaving. It is a celebration of the completion of the Resurrection. If there is no Ascension, then the resurrection is limited to one place and time and body – but the whole point of the Jesus story is that God's grace and abundance and life-giving power is not limited in space and time, to one country or one people. It is open to everyone. The Ascension is the same celebration as the empty tomb – he is not here, he is risen. He is no longer on earth in one place and time, he is in all times and places through the Holy Spirit.

Many depictions of the Ascension show the disciples looking up at a pair of feet sticking out of a cloud. The incarnation, the coming-to-be-one-with-us of the Son of God, was all about God walking in our shoes, in our skin, in our feet, in the dust of the earth and the dustiness – the frail, earthy, messiness, of everything it is to be human. Even the dust of human death. But he was not contained by that. The feet sticking out of the cloud are a reminder that God shared in the dusty stuff of humanity, and that he has transformed it and taken it into the heart of God. The God who came down to walk in our dust, returns to the heavens carrying transformed, resurrected humanity with him. And he promises us the Holy Spirit not just because of the gifts the Spirit, but because it is the Spirit who continues to make Jesus present.

Do not hold onto me, but go and tell. Jesus can walk with you along the sometimes dusty, sometimes messy path of your life because he once returned to the Father. And he asks you, empowers you by the Spirit, not to hold onto him. He gives himself in the bread and wine of the altar not to fill a hole inside you only, but so that you can share his presence with others, so that you can invite and welcome them into the relationship which makes us whole. He went away in one place at one time to be present by the Spirit in all places and forever. He is not here but is risen. Do not hold onto me but go and tell. Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**