

Standing Around!

Acts 1⁶⁻¹⁴; Psalm 68¹⁻¹⁰; 1 Peter 4¹⁻¹⁴ 5⁶⁻¹¹; John 17¹⁻¹¹

Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? (Acts 1¹¹)

If there was an event in Jesus life that you could be present for, this is probably the one for me.

To have been present at the conception would have been to see nothing;
to have been present at Jesus' birth would be messy;
to have been present as he taught would be to shout at those who mocked Jesus and to tell them that this man changed the world;
to have been present at a miracle would be awesome;
to have been present at his death would just be too much;
to have been present at the resurrection would have blown your mind.

The Ascension just seems so gentle. The elements, as Luke records them as he begins his second volume of his *History of Christianity*, are:

- ✦ Jesus answers a question about the coming of the **kingdom** by saying **you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.**
- ✦ Jesus tells his disciples what their job is: **you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.** Witnessing begins where you are - did you notice that? - and then it goes out and the inclusion of **Judea and Samaria** makes the point that it is for everyone: those you like and those that you do not like.
- ✦ Jesus then starts rising and being received into a **cloud** would have been understood as being received into God (the 'cloud' was the symbol of God's presence since the Exodus).
- ✦ If you and I had been there we might also have been caught **gazing up towards heaven**, but the surprises continue when **suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.**
- ✦ **Why do you stand looking up?** The task is time limited - **This Jesus... will come in the same way you saw him go into**

heaven. Events, such as the bomb in Manchester - and the daily destruction of life in other parts of the world - show us just how urgent this is.

- ✦ The first thing the disciples do is go back to where they had been, to pray (which is a very Christian way to avoid doing anything practical) and then to hold a committee meeting to appoint a committee member!

What matters is not the bit of Jesus' life we might want to witness, but in which parts of our lives Jesus is present.

How easily we find ourselves standing around - actually or metaphorically - and avoid the duty that is our to be Jesus witnesses.

How readily we talk and organise the Church whilst avoiding its primary purpose - of witnessing to Jesus.

How tempting it can be to find a part of our spiritual life where we felt comfortable and stand and look at it.

How tempting it can be in a Church with a significant history as this has to find a point where you think it might have been better (remember it was rebuilt twice in one century to accommodate growth) and to stay there.

Yet as soon as Jesus has given his disciples a task there are angels to push them - and in 10 days, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter bursts out, empowered by God, to tell everyone, anyone, about Jesus.

Is the task clear - **to be my witnesses** - to us?

How are we doing it?