



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Ascension (14th May) 2026

It is all too easy to suppose that with the Ascension, the story somewhat comes to a close: that Jesus has said all that He had to say and with that guidance, it was over to the Church. However, there is a detail in the narrative of the Ascension as described in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, which suggests that it was not quite that straightforward.

When the Apostles met together with the risen Lord just prior to His Ascension, they asked Him, "Are You going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?" Jesus, being more patient than am I, refrained from responding, "Have you understood nothing?" The question hearkened back to a popular expectation of Jesus prior to His Crucifixion - that embodied in the crowd, who greeted Him outside Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday of a figure, who would overthrow the Roman yoke and re-establish Israelite independence.

In hindsight, of course, we understand that the events of the Passion and Death of Christ point to a different Purpose to His Incarnate Ministry; but clearly this had not been obvious at the time - at least not to everyone.

The Ascension was not the end of the story, not the end of Christ's work in the world, but, as Winston Churchill might have put it, merely the end of the beginning. The incarnate Ministry of the Son of God had accomplished just sufficient to establish the Church, which would continue His Work; and more than that the knowledge of His continuing risen Presence in their midst, manifested, above all, in the celebration of the Eucharist.

An important aspect of this insight is that the revelation of God's Will and Purpose did not end with the Ascension: in other words, there is not a time-bound period when God revealed Truth through Christ's engagement with the world; but that His work of revealing the divine Will continues through His risen Presence.

Whilst it can be said, as Anglican formularies do, that Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary for Salvation, drawing out the significance of their words and texts requires further consideration - and reflexion often necessarily informed by events and experiences subsequent both to the Ascension and also the closure of admission of documents to the New Testament - something, which was rather later than many people recognise.

Indeed, a number of texts, the awareness of which is now mainly limited to academic circles, were in the first couple of Christian centuries read at Eucharistic assemblies in the same way as the texts to which we now accord the status of Holy Scripture. This fluidity of textual status represents something of the same situation as the question put by the Apostles to the risen Christ immediately prior to the Ascension - the Church grappling with the question of whether the risen Christ was and is leading us.

There is and will be no point before the consummation of the age at which we can say that this process of discernment is complete. As we shall hear several times over the next few days from texts, to which we now accord the rank and status of Holy Scripture, the work of the Spirit in leading us into all Truth continues.

This should encourage us to be careful in our deliberations as we are mindful of the fact that our debates are not ephemeral discussions, but searches for Truth. We should remember that we are endeavouring to contribute to the gradual accumulation of God-given Wisdom, which will guide the Church of the future. This is a responsibility, which we should carry with great care, conscious of the fact that we are conduits of the continuing revelation of divine Truth.