

May 2018



Dear Friends,

Yesterday, Karen and the family went to watch a performance of the Shakespeare play "Macbeth", broadcast to the cinema from the National Theatre, which they enjoyed. However, some people obviously did not enjoy it- maybe it was the language of Tudor England or there was as too much blood and gore-and they left at the interval without seeing the final acts. Over the weekend I also watched a video of the detective "Poirot" who went to the theatre to watch a performance of his friend Ariadne Oliver's play about her Finnish detective. Poirot also left at the interval, he had worked out who the perpetrator was (or so he thought) and he did not think he would learn anything by staying to watch the final acts.

In the Church's cycle of seasons and readings, we start the churches year in November with the beginning of Advent. After Christmas, we look at the Incarnation – what it means for Jesus to live among us. Lent prepares us by telling the story of the road to the crucifixion of Jesus where we remember what our sins have cost Jesus. Easter tells us of what it means for Jesus to be alive, how having conquered death and sin, he can change our lives. These are like various '**acts**' of a play but the problem for many Christians is that they think that everything is completed with the resurrection-sins are forgiven, we are reconciled to God, we are now adopted as sons and daughters of God. All these things are wonderfully true, and so much more, but there are two more '**acts**' of the play to come; Ascension and Pentecost. To use our play analogy, some people '**leave at the interval**' having learned of the story of Jesus coming to save us from our sins, thinking, like Poirot, that they know enough to guess the ending. They do not listen to the last two acts which are actually vital to understanding the purposes of God in sending Jesus.

Ascension Day, which we will celebrate on Thursday May 10<sup>th</sup>, is the celebration of Jesus making full atonement in heaven for our sins, ascending to the Holy of Holies in heaven, and he is now glorified in heaven, shown in John's vision in the book of Revelation. Now Jesus can be available for each of us at all times, and He lives to plead his blood for our forgiveness every time we sin, and to intercede for us. However the final act of our '**play**', which is in some respect gives a vital purpose and meaning to the other '**acts**' is the Day of Pentecost, which we will celebrate on Sunday May 20<sup>th</sup>. Because of the '**fall**' of mankind, detailed in Genesis 3, the world and mankind have become corrupted and separated from God and His purposes. The story of the Old Testament is the story of God choosing a person, Abraham, and then a people under Moses to represent God's way of reclaiming the world for His own. The Jewish nation failed in this vocation which resulted in the exile. But Jesus came to be the fulfilment of the '**true Israel**', and his death and resurrection and ascension have reconciled us to God by atoning for our sins. Now the real business can begin-the church, filled with the Holy Spirit, has been given the task of representing Jesus and to be involved in the renewal of the earth. This will take many forms:

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- Working for the relief of poverty and for social justice in our world,
- Witnessing to the change in our lives that Jesus brings through evangelism and mission.
- Inspiring worship, prayer and fellowship in the church.
- Working for peace and reconciliation in families, groups and nations.
- Training leaders of churches and those in public life.
- Leading Christians on the path of discipleship.
- And many other things.

If we '**leave at the interval**' and do not take proper account of Ascension and Pentecost, we can wrongly make our Christian faith about '**us**'-'**our**' forgiveness, '**our**' personal relationship with God, '**our**' spirituality', '**our**' ministry to help others become like '**us**'. However with the purposes of God shown in Ascension and Pentecost, we realise that God's primary purpose is to work on '**us**'; transforming us more and more into the likeness of Christ, so that we can be used in God's purpose of reclaiming and reconciling the world to Him, through being transformed individuals and transformed churches.

There is therefore no place in the Christian life for '**leaving at the interval**' and 'bypassing' the Ascension and Pentecost, like Poirot, thinking we have 'got it all' with the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus-Ascension and Pentecost are integral to the purpose of God in making it possible for the Holy Spirit to work in and through us.

This hymn can help us as we call on God to renew our faith at this time:

**Holy Spirit, we welcome you. Holy Spirit, we welcome You.  
Move among us with holy fire, as we lay aside all earthly desires,  
Hands reach out and our hearts aspire.  
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, we welcome You.**

**Holy Spirit, we welcome You. Holy Spirit, we welcome You.  
Let the breeze of Your presence blow, that Your children here might truly know  
How to move in the Spirit's flow.  
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, we welcome You.**

**Holy Spirit, we welcome You. Holy Spirit, we welcome You.  
Please accomplish in me today some new work of loving grace, I pray;  
Unreservedly have Your way.  
Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit, we welcome You.**

In Christian love

Paul