

Dear Friends,

Happy Ascension Day

LUKE 24: 50-53

We have come to the last page of Luke's gospel. The writer ends by closing a circle that was opened on the first page. The gospel begins with the story of Zechariah, a Priest serving in the Jerusalem Temple. He has an encounter with an angel who tells him that his wife Elizabeth is to have a baby. Zechariah however, cannot believe what he's told and the angel makes him unable to speak until the child is born. The Priest then goes out to face the congregation. They have been waiting for him to announce the blessing upon them. But he has lost the power of speech. He cannot bless them.

A couple of pages later, but still only in chapter two, Luke tells of another angelic visit. This time it's a multitude of angels who come to a bunch of bewildered shepherds. One angel tells of "Good news of great joy for all the people" for a child has been born. Then a whole chorus of angels touch the earth with the song of heaven which is the praise of God.

That's how Luke begins the gospel. The end goes back to the beginning. It began with Zechariah unable to announce a blessing. It ends with Jesus lifting up his hands and blessing his friends. While Jesus is blessing them, he is carried to heaven. The gospel began and now ends in the Temple. The followers worship Jesus and return "to Jerusalem" where they are "continually in the Temple blessing God". It began with a promise of good news of great joy for all the people. It ends with the friends experiencing that joy as they return "to Jerusalem with great joy". The joy will spread to all the people as the friends fulfil their commission to proclaim the good news "to all the nations", but that's for Luke's next book. It began with the worship of heaven touching earth. It ends with earth joining in with the worship of heaven as the followers of Jesus praise God.

We might have expected the friends to feel sadness and loss as Jesus withdraws from them. But there are no signs of grief, only great joy. They seem to know that Jesus only goes so that he can come again in a new and better way. As the man of Nazareth, he was limited. He could only be with a few people at any one time. Now he enters into a new relationship with all people everywhere and with the whole creation. In the letter to the Ephesians it says, he "ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things". They also perhaps began to realise that as Jesus ascends to heaven he takes them with him. Ephesians puts it this way "God ... made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus".

May you in heart and mind ascend to where Jesus is and with him continually dwell.

God bless you,  
Tony