

In our reading from Acts, Jesus gives the disciples a commission: “you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth”, but first he tells the disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Jesus calls us and he equips us.

The words from Acts perhaps remind us of the great commission at the end of Matthew’s gospel, where Jesus says: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”.

After Jesus has commissioned the disciples, he is taken up to heaven and a cloud hides him from their sight. The cloud symbolises the very presence of God. Jesus is going home. But he is not abandoning the disciples. In Acts, we read that, suddenly, two men dressed in white stood beside the disciples and told them, “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven”.

In John’s gospel, Jesus says something similar to the disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”. Believing in God means trusting in him.

The disciples wait patiently for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit fulfils the promise made by Jesus that he would be with us always, that he would not leave us to fend for ourselves. The Spirit is sometimes called the *Parakletos*, the strengthener, the encourager. The Spirit gives us strength when our own strength is insufficient.

As the disciples wait, we read that they pray constantly. It is likely that they regularly used the Lord’s Prayer, the words taught by Jesus himself. That prayer includes the familiar words, “thy kingdom come”.

Thy Kingdom Come is also the name of a global prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray, from Ascension to Pentecost, for more people to come to know Jesus. Its website says that these difficult and trying times present, now more than ever,

“an incredible opportunity for the Church worldwide, to unite in prayer so that our family, friends and neighbours will come to know the love and peace of Jesus Christ for themselves. One of our Key themes for Thy Kingdom Come is prayer and care.”

When we pray Thy Kingdom Come, we are praying for the world to be transformed, and for the ability to play our part in bringing that transformation about.

The pandemic has made us all pause and reflect. People talk about “the new normal”, possibly a rather irritating expression. But it is right to say that the pandemic has given us a chance to do things differently. Dare we believe that it is an opportunity to make the world a better place, showing greater care for other people and for the environment. Let us pray that is so.

Thy kingdom come. Amen.