

Rev Tim Perkins
May 11th 2021

“When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.” Luke 24: 50 – 51.

Dear Friends,

The words quoted above are taken from the very end of St Luke’s Gospel and the account of Jesus’ ascension. I am struck by the fact that the very last thing Jesus did before being taken up into heaven was to bless his disciples. *“Bless”* is not a word that we often use in society today. I guess its most common usage is when someone in our presence sneezes. No one really knows the origin of this practice but there is a superstitious view that held that a sneeze is the body’s attempt to rid itself of evil spirits (!) and as Scripture indicates, when an evil spirit departs, we are to invite God’s presence to fill the gap.

I like the second half of that but as someone who suffers with multiple strong environmental allergies, I am fairly sure that a sneeze is the body’s attempt to rid itself of allergens and viruses not evil spirits – at least I hope so!

But it does give us a brief insight into what a blessing is and why we should pay more attention to blessing others. To bless someone is simply to invite God’s presence and goodness into their midst and their life. It is to want the fullness of the divine life for them. That is surely what Jesus was doing as he was taken up into heaven – inviting God’s continuing presence to be in and with the disciples and to enable them to experience the fullness of the divine life.

And this is not the first time Luke has Jesus speaking of blessing. In the first chapter of his Gospel, he tells of Elizabeth’s greeting to Mary *“Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear!... Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promise to her!”*

And then Mary’s response: *“From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me.”* Elizabeth and Mary were blessed by the coming of God’s presence into their lives in extraordinary ways.

Then in chapter 6, Luke adds another dimension to this concept of blessing, and particularly the question, *“Who is blessed?”* In his version of the Sermon on the Mount he has Jesus say to his disciples: *“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.”* Inviting the presence and goodness of God into any situation can turn it on its head and lead to the transformation that only the fullness of the divine life can bring.

Jesus blesses his disciples and invites his disciples to bless the world in which they live. Immediately after the blessings (and their corresponding woes) in chapter 6, Jesus goes on to teach his disciples: *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”*

As Jesus' lifted his hands in blessing his disciples (a sign of offering them to God in prayer and calling God's blessing down upon them) so we are to lift our hands up in blessing the world we live in and those who share our lives in some way.

It is appropriate therefore that Ascension Day marks the beginning of the now annual, "Thy Kingdom Come" global, ecumenical prayer initiative, of which the Methodist Church in Great Britain is a partner. Some of our churches will be actively taking part in this initiative between Ascension Day (Thurs 13th) and Pentecost (Sun 23rd) and will be receiving resources to enable them to commit to praying daily for their communities and the wider world. But the main focus of the initiative is to encourage each one of us to commit to pray daily for 5 people we know to come to faith in Jesus, to experience God's presence in their lives. It is an opportunity to bless them through our prayers and to see what God might want to do in their lives.

Whether your church is actively involved in this initiative or not, whether you have received resources to help with this or not, it is something that each one of us can commit to for a period of 10 days. I challenge you to have a go! Lift up your hands and bless those you know through the power of prayer. If you would like to find out more about it then please visit: www.thykingdomcome.global or [Thy Kingdom Come \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://ThyKingdomCome(methodist.org.uk))

As a Circuit we are also encouraging people to give thanks to God for the businesses, community groups and volunteers who have given so much time and energy to help others throughout the last year, as part of our response to the District's Real Love campaign. Again, an opportunity to seek God's blessing on others through prayer.

Every blessing,

Rev Tim

Circuit Website

The Circuit website is a great place to look for resources to help you worship and for news and events from around the circuit. The address for the website is: www.wandamethodists.org.uk

"Climate Change Emergency: Resources for a Green Church Conference."

This will take place via zoom on Saturday 12th June from 9.30am – 3.00pm. As we approach the Global Climate Summit to be held in Glasgow in the autumn, this conference is a great opportunity for us to engage in some key issues for how we as Christians respond to our climate crisis. To register for the conference please contact Sue Cutting at sue.cutting1209@gmail.com

We are promised: "Inspiring keynote speakers to stimulate your imagination, develop your understanding of the Bible and reinvigorate your worship life. Engaging workshops with pioneers who are already bringing together faith and action for a better world. Topics covered include:

- Biblical Theology for a Green Church
- Climate change as an existential crisis
- Liturgy & Prayer for a Green Church
- COP26: what are we doing to campaign?
- Craftivism for COP26
- The Church as a Prophetic Community
- Green Church and Evangelism
- The God Plot – The city allotment and Green Church