

Ascension to Pentecost 8



**“The Holy Spirit is that power
which opens eyes that are closed,
hearts that are unaware and minds
that shrink from too much reality.”**

John V Taylor

Prayer

**Steady our focus, O God,
as we wait for your Spirit,
and strengthen the bonds
between us, your disciples.
Amen**

“...they were all together in one place.” Acts 2.1

This illuminated letter (c1430) is from a liturgical songbook attributed to Stefano da Verona. An initial A is formed by two sinewy dragons, their necks intertwining to form the crossbar. Sitting snugly inside their curving bodies are the twelve disciples (Matthias having replaced Judas) who, in turn, circle a woman in blue. After the Ascension they were ‘constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary, Jesus’ mother’ (Acts 1.14). So here they all are.

Closely, as if for comfort, they huddle up, turning anxious faces this way and that. The soft colours of the artist’s palette seem to accentuate their vulnerability and the reassuring hand-on-shoulder (foreground figures) is a tender thing indeed.

Nothing has happened yet and uncertainty fills the air but they are obediently waiting as instructed. We know, however, because we have a privileged view into the heavens above, that the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove is about to be sent forth by the Father.

What do we see as we gaze at this painting in the context of coronavirus?

We might well look twice at the proximity of those bodies... to lockdown eyes they are too close for comfort! Yet they may also stir in us a longing for the closeness we have lost. Even so, we won’t be able to gather physically together with fellow-disciples this Pentecost or put a reassuring hand on the shoulder of one especially anxious.

Yes, we’ve found other ways of being ‘together in one place’ - technology enables us to assemble in groups and look into human faces - but you do not have to see or touch another to be together in mood, to be of one heart and mind, to wait expectantly as a body.

In these last days before Pentecost, there is comfort in knowing that we are all together in the ‘place’ of our corporate waiting, bound closely in our longing for all that the Spirit brings.