



**St Mark's Church, Reigate**

May 2024

### **Letter from the Vicar, Father Martin Colton**

Dear Friends

This month we come to the end of the Easter season, and the festivals of Ascension Day and Pentecost. The Easter season overall recalls those fifty days after Easter, when the risen Jesus appeared regularly to his disciples, until his final appearance at the Ascension, and at Pentecost they would receive the Holy Spirit, the presence of God in their lives in a new way.

So this is a month of transition, from Jesus on earth to Jesus in heaven. On Sundays we hear passages from John's gospel in which Jesus, before his death, tries to prepare his disciples not just for his death, but for this transition, the day when he will leave them for good. He knows what they have ahead of them – the grief and despair of the cross, the astonishment and joy of the resurrection, the uncertainties of those fifty days when he will come and go unpredictably.

That confusion of feelings and experience is mirrored in our own lives of faith – the high times, the dry times, the joy and the doubt. So Jesus's words in John have great resonance for us, as he seeks to reassure his disciples. They may have understood little of what he tries to tell them at the time – but his words will come back to them later.

On Ascension Day, we hear Luke's words: "As they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight". This description can seem an anachronism in the modern world – we don't believe heaven is 'up there' any longer – but they are the words of someone trying to express an experience which was beyond words.

Jesus had appeared and disappeared repeatedly since his resurrection, yet something in his words or in this experience convinces the disciples they will never see him again. Jesus's earthly ministry is ended, as he returns to his Father in heaven, but Jesus in heaven will be present with all of us, everywhere, freed again from the limits of space and time. Moreover, his final departure turns the disciples' focus from looking back, trying to carry on as before, to looking forward and outward, knowing that what happens next is up to them.

But they weren't, of course, left entirely to their own resources. For Jesus leaves with the promise of the Holy Spirit, and at Pentecost, they receive that Spirit. God becomes present with them in another way – not Jesus walking beside them, but the Spirit inspiring, driving and guiding them. The gift of the Spirit takes that small bunch of bewildered countrymen, and turns them into a living, witnessing church. Let us pray that the Spirit may take us and make us live too – that we may know God's presence and love in our lives today, be aware of Jesus walking alongside us in support, and be inspired by that Spirit to live for God and witness to Jesus today.

With every blessing,