

# Villages - June 2023

I write this message on Ascension Day. Once upon a time this was actually a significant festival in England. According to the Church of England, it is still one of the principal feasts, alongside Christmas and Easter. In many countries in northern Europe it is actually a public holiday. And yet I imagine that most of you - like me until I became a vicar - hardly even noticed the occasion. It doesn't capture the imagination as much as the more well-known festivals.

But I think that is a shame. Not because I want you all to join us on a beautiful early Thursday morning at St Mary's, Calstone as we hold a short service and watch a balloon float off into the brilliant, clear sky—although you would be most welcome. But because of what the ascension means.

As we reflect on Jesus' ascension, we are reminded that his story didn't finish with him dying on the cross, or even with him coming back to life. It continued with him returning to his home in heaven where, the Biblical book of Hebrews teaches us, he "always lives to make intercession for us". In other words, he is always speaking up to God on our behalf, asking him to act with mercy and help towards us. The Ascension is a reminder that it is worth praying because our words are met with sympathetic understanding.

Secondly, the Ascension reminds us that this world is not all there is. The symbolic act of watching the balloon rise into the sky raises our eyes from this world's worries, and points to a better future. There are some problems which even the greatest advances in science or social

behaviour will never be able to solve, but there is an invitation to anyone who wishes to accept it, to continue this journey in a better version of this world, one without the problems that beset this one: whether those we suffer, or those we cause.

And finally, just as those first disciples eventually had to drag their eyes away from the clouds and back to earth, we too must engage with the world we are in with commitment and love. We are called to trust that there is one in heaven who is both loving and powerful, and in that confidence to turn our attention to the challenges around us, knowing we are not alone.

This month, as the warm weather and clearer skies appear, I pray that you may find yourself looking up, and as you do so, may you, like those first disciples, be reassured and inspired by the experience.