**MEDITATION FOR ASCENSION SUNDAY MUSICAL VESPERS**

**Acts 4: 1-11; Ephesians 1: 15-end Sunday 16 May 2021**

**On a scale of 1-10, how likely are we to be excited about the Feast of the Ascension?! Christmas has a life all its own, a mix of the birth of Jesus and a time for families and friends; Easter comes as a welcome end to Lent, and is full of themes of life over death. Even Pentecost is upbeat as the birthday of the Church. But Ascension?**

**The Stepney Area Clergy Conference this past week was quite challenging. If as if we were in any doubt, the shape of the Diocese of London – and especially I suspect the Stepney Episcopal Area – is going to change - and, I suspect, change quite quickly. The former bishop’s maxim of one priest for each separate parish will be replaced with teams of churches with fewer, younger, mission-minded largely evangelical clergy. The status quo, we were told, is not an option. It is not a question of *shall we change* but *what change do we need to embrace?***

**Which could appear to be really rather Ascension-like with Jesus leaving for a place at his Father’s side with only a promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit to try to reassure his disciples that they are not being left entirely on their own.**

**Now I am the first to believe that no Church should sit on its laurels and fail to plan carefully for the future. But the relentless tone of the presentations led me to worry that that these new plans are just a bit too well worked out, the thinking of a few very articulate and motivated individuals who are not very close to the hearts and minds of so many ordinary English Christians who are struggling with how to find the voice of Jesus amid all the other competing influences.**

**Indeed I began to feel some sympathy Jim Palmer, for a former leader of one of the American mega churches who said that among the mistakes he made in the past included: putting style over substance, numbers over faces, accountability over acceptance, charisma over compassion, certainty over wonder and appearance over authenticity. Having too many ready answers seems to me to be a recipe for building a sect rather than a Church.**

**I would like to suggest that the lesson of Ascension is a much more gentle, interactive, organic openness to all the possibilities that the future may offer – with very few certainties and a lot of very patient listening. It may seem scary but I think it is what Jesus intended.**