

Last Thursday was Ascension Day, so called because it recalls the last appearance of Jesus to his disciples following his resurrection on that first Easter. The name Ascension comes from Mark's Gospel and Luke's Gospel which tell of Jesus being taken up into Heaven – he ascended.

Jesus told his disciples that he would always be with them and promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit (at Pentecost). On Ascension Day we celebrate the Kingship of Jesus as he ascends to the throne of Heaven. You may recall Thomas Kelly's wonderful hymn, "the Head that once was crowned with thorns, is crowned with glory now."

Ascension Day is the 40th day after Easter and always falls on a Thursday, hence its other name, which is Holy Thursday. We celebrate this event on the Sunday following because of the importance of the event in the life of Jesus.

There are several customs associated with Ascension Sunday. One you may remember here at Trinity, was the releasing of balloons on the hill outside the Church. How the children would thrill to see "their" balloon rise up over the treetops and disappear from sight! Whether they really caught the significance or not, remains to be seen, but certainly many of us who were adults did, and quietly enjoyed the symbolism. This custom was not continued however, because it was recognized as being environmentally unfriendly.

There is a lesser-known custom sometimes associated with this time of year, and that is the "Beating of the Bounds". This ceremony has existed in Britain for well over 2000 years and involves residents of a community gathering to walk around the boundaries of their farm,

estate, or church and pausing to pray as they pass certain trees, walls or fences that mark the extent of their property. As they pray, they also ritually beat these landmarks with willow sticks, hence the name, "beating the bounds". This practice was originally observed on one of the three Rogation Days prior to Ascension Day. However, in some areas of Britain, the practice was later transferred to Ascension Sunday.

I first became aware of this custom during my curacy at All Saints Church in Collingwood in 1990. The rector at that time was Canon Barry Ralph, and in order to introduce me to some new learning experiences, he had me plan this ritual of the Beating of the Bounds for Ascension Sunday that year. The congregation loved it. On Sunday morning at the 10:30 service, we gathered in the Church and then formally processed out into the churchyard and around the church boundaries. At each corner of the yard we stopped and said a few words followed by a prayer of thanksgiving and a prayer of petition for future blessing. We "beat" the ground with cedar branches, and then moved on to the next corner. It was very moving, especially to see the children rise to the occasion with a due sense of purpose, and a clear understanding of what was being done. Marking the boundaries of our place of worship! Giving thanks for the blessing of time and space. What a wonderful way to celebrate this very special day in our Church year.

Today we give thanks for Trinity Church, and although we are not engaging in this ritual of "beating the bounds", may we all become more mindful of the way in which God has blessed us with this beautiful Place of Worship, welcome and community gathering. May we also ask God for future Blessing.

Rev. Elizabeth +