

One of the joys I have discovered of being a grandfather is that you are once again permitted to do things like building sandcastles and the like on the pretence that you are amusing your grandchildren.

A few months ago, we picked the boys up from their play school and headed for the airport and parked the car on the perimeter road to watch the planes taking off. Even though I understand the physics of the whole thing, how the shape of the aircraft wing produces a difference in pressure between the top and the bottom of the wing, I am still amazed as I watch an aircraft take off – so I concede that I took the boys there as much for my own amusement as theirs!

As it accelerates the aircraft has to get to a certain speed before the aircraft can take off, but there comes a point as the plane accelerates along the run way when the pilot has to decide ‘Am I going ahead with take off?’ – after that point he or she is committed to taking off. Beyond that point there is no turning back.

As I was remarking last week, over these Sundays of the Easter season, the emphasis in our Gospel readings has moved from a remembering of past events and we have moved into more reflective mood as we have been encouraged to think of the meaning of the life and ministry of Jesus, of his death and resurrection. Last Thursday was observed as the Feast of the Ascension and we read in the lessons for that day, as we do in our lesson from Acts this morning, of Jesus’ departure from his disciples and his return to the Father. However we interpret these passages, there is a final irrevocable change in the

relationship between Jesus and his disciples – that is now in the past and there is no turning back. They are told to wait for the coming of the Spirit.

As I was remarking last Sunday, there is a certain comfort in the past. There is a certainty, we know what we are dealing with, even if it is uncomfortable.

You may recall the Israelites in the desert after the Exodus from Egypt, complaining to Moses, ‘Why did you bring us out into the desert to die of hunger – sure didn’t we have food to spare when we were in Egypt?’ There is a nostalgia for the certainty of their captivity – better the certainty of past captivity than the risks of a promised future and of what lies ahead.

On that first Easter morning, at the first tentative visit to the tomb, we are told of men in white asking, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead, he is not here, he is risen.’ Then this morning, as we read Luke’s presentation of the Ascension, we read again of men in white asking, as disciples tried to hang on to a last glimpse of Jesus, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven?’

Like the aircraft hurtling along the runway towards take-off, the time has come when they must focus on the future, on preparation for the future, of a service and faithfulness to Jesus in the future, in different places, different circumstances.