**Ascension Day: Jesus says goodbye**

To consider how we feel when we lose a very good friend and relate this to the time when Jesus left his disciples and returned to heaven.

*by Laurence Chilcott*

Suitable for Key Stage 2

**Aims**

To consider how we feel when we lose a very good friend and relate this to the time when Jesus left his disciples and returned to heaven.

**Preparation and materials**

* Christians celebrate the time when Jesus went back up into heaven, called Ascension because he ‘ascended’. Ascension occurs 40 days after Easter, on a Thursday, and many churches hold special services to celebrate this event in the life of Jesus. The Catholic Church in England and Wales usually celebrate it on the Sunday following. In Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Germany, schoolchildren have a holiday on Ascension Day.
* Display pictures of people saying goodbye – waving from a train, hugging each other, wiping away a tear, evacuees leaving home and so on.

**Assembly**

1. Friends are very important to us. Sometimes, especially at school, we will have a special friend whom we call our ‘best friend’. Best friends spend as much time as possible together and, at special times, such as birthday parties, sleepovers or trips to the cinema, they will be first on the invitation list. Best friends help one another and give support in difficult times; they are loyal and can be trusted.
2. Imagine how you would feel if your best friend had to move away and would no longer be going to the same school as you. Who would you sit next to on the school trip? Who would be your partner in PE? Who would you play with at breaktime? No doubt you would feel it was just not fair, but you would also understand that you couldn’t do anything about it.

Eventually the time would come for you to say goodbye. You’d promise to keep in touch, perhaps arrange to visit one another in the school holidays, but you would feel a real sense of loss. You would be left wondering if your friendship could stay strong when you would no longer see each other almost every day.

1. Jesus had a group of special friends – the disciples – and they thought of him as their best friend. For some three years they had travelled around the country together, sharing meals and talking long into the night. He had amazed them with miracles of healing, he had taught them many things and explained how God loved them, but, one day, he told them that he would soon have to leave them. They couldn’t believe it – they just couldn’t face losing their best friend.
2. Not long after Jesus had spoken about leaving them, it happened – and it was a nightmare! Judas, who had been one of the group, betrayed Jesus and led the authorities to him. The friends were with Jesus when they arrested him, but they weren’t very good friends – they ran away. One of them, Peter, followed the guards who arrested Jesus at a distance, but he pretended that he didn’t even know him when a servant girl asked if he was his friend. Jesus was left to face his captors alone, deserted by his friends. He was cruelly treated, subjected to a mocking trial and eventually crucified, which means that he was put to death on a cross.
3. When Jesus was crucified, the friends were devastated. They realised that they had let him down and regretted how they had not tried to do something to help him. They were afraid that they, too, might be arrested and were confused about what to do, now Jesus was dead.

On Easter Sunday, however, Jesus rose from the dead and was seen by some of his friends. They could hardly believe it, but it was indeed their friend Jesus, they had no doubt about that. He was different in some ways but that didn’t matter, for their friend had returned to them.

1. Although they didn’t realise it, Jesus wasn’t back for good. For 40 days, Jesus appeared to many people in many different places, but one day he took them up to a mountain and talked to them for the last time. Jesus told them that they were to tell people about God’s love for the world and how he had been raised from the dead according to God’s plan. He knew it wasn’t going to be easy, but he promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to help them. Then, suddenly, he was taken from their sight – ascending, being lifted up to heaven to return to his Father.
2. So, when it seemed as if they had only just got their friend back, he left them again. They didn’t know what the future held and wondered how they could face life without their leader. All they could do was go to Jerusalem as Jesus had instructed and wait for the Holy Spirit to come. The Spirit did come … but that’s a story for another day.

**Time for reflection**

Do you have something that reminds you of a special friend? It may be a gift he or she gave you for your birthday or perhaps a photograph of you together. Although, as you grow up, your friends may change and keepsakes are lost or mislaid, you will always have the memories of your friends at school. Think about one of your best friends and what makes him or her special to you.

Jesus’ friends, his disciples, had only memories of their time with him, too. It is from what they remembered and told others or wrote themselves that we have the accounts of Jesus’ life today in the New Testament.

*Prayer*
Father God,
we thank you for friends whom we will always remember, even if they are no longer with us. We are thankful that you have promised to be a friend to us and ask that you show us how to be loyal and true friends at all times.
**Amen.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7bwSk5pCsg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LRP8d7hhpoQ>