

## Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion

Seventh Sunday of Easter 24 May 2020 and  
the commemoration of the Ascension.

Is this the time?

Our church may still be locked but...

This is a precious moment  
to remember that church is bigger than stone and building.

This is perhaps a gentle reminder  
that prayer is larger than architecture and liturgical design.

This is the perfect time to return  
over and over to the sanctuary of the heart.

*Then they gathered around him (Jesus) and asked him, "Lord,  
are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*

*Acts 1: 6*

*And we could add today: are you going to restore the  
familiar patterns of worship in our churches?*

*Are you going to restore the nation's economy?*

*But these are actually statements telling God what we think He should be doing, and our  
only question is: 'when?' Hmm...*

*Access the link for a Taizé chant; The Kingdom of the Lord is Justice and Peace*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WL1\\_IhVTJmk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WL1_IhVTJmk)

*The kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.  
Come, Lord, and open in us the gates of your kingdom.*

### Opening prayer

What was is not.  
Is not coming back.

What is  
waits to be defined.

In that moment  
a breath  
the story takes root.



Ascension. The painting (on wood)  
in a stave church at Eke, Sweden  
dates from about 1200.

The empty tomb  
now the resurrection.

Ascension  
life raised up  
shifts our gaze to possibility.

Breathe into the void.  
Loneliness births solitude.  
Chaos bears community.

What was is not.  
What is  
awaits breath.

*(From Liturgy Outside)*

### **We seek forgiveness**

We are often not the Easter People  
that we should be,  
living in the certain knowledge  
of your great mercy and love.  
Distracted by the world around us  
we fail to hear your voice,  
or hide when faith is challenged  
as we wander off the path.

Lord, help me to trust in you,  
to believe that no prayer goes unheeded,  
no word is ever uttered in vain,  
no cry for help ever ignored.  
So that through every fear, and whatever anxiety,  
I may rejoice in your comfort,  
find strength in your love,  
receive your forgiveness  
know peace in your presence. Amen.

### **Alternative collect for Ascension Day**

Risen Christ,  
you have raised our human nature to the throne of heaven:  
help us to seek and serve you,  
that we may join you at the Father's side,  
where you reign with the Spirit in glory,  
now and for ever.



## Alleluia, Sing to Jesus

This is a popular hymn for Ascension Day services. The words appear on the screen. Singer and choir are not known. You will find it at the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56a4w7XxvfY>

### Reading

Acts 1:6-11 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>6</sup> Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

<sup>7</sup> He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

<sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”



*There is an overwhelming vitality in the ascending Jesus into thick clouds of stormy cumulus, thrusting the onlookers aside. The pair talking in the background are Moses and Elijah. Painting in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice by Tintoretto 1579*

### **Comment (the result of a series of emails between Keith and Richard)**

Ascension is an important day in the Church year, but it is also a difficult one. There are many ways of approaching it, and it is too easy to get bogged down in fruitless debate about the exact nature of what happened.

But, given that in the mind set of Jesus's followers, Christ had demonstrated his power over death and his desire to maintain his presence in this world, by the appearance of his visible resurrected body, then unless Jesus is to keep on with occasional appearances, something has to happen to demonstrate conclusively that this stage has come to a close. Whatever happens must also fit within that current mind set. What did happen is a creative act of God we call the Ascension.

We are told by Luke that the Ascension was a visual event witnessed by the disciples, which he described in today's reading. As a result we form a picture in our own mind as we try to recreate the scene. Many artists (and poets) have been there before us to do the same thing, with varying results. Pictures like that of Tintoretto above are at least intelligible to us today even though we may well say: 'I don't think it happened quite like that.'

And that would be true for any other representation, old or modern. Tintoretto's painting may not be a true depiction, but that does not mean it is a false one either. What actually happened is immaterial. We should see the Ascension as a symbol and symbols in the Bible express deep truths about the relationship between God, humankind and indeed all creation. So we need to ask ourselves what meaning is this account seeking to convey, and how can or should I respond to it.

The account of the Ascension presents us with a challenge, but it is the questions it demands of us that are more significant than any we might pose to the evangelist.

*There now follow two other pieces. The first is a poem by Malcolm Guite on the Ascension, which certainly goes farther than just trying to recount an event.*

*The second is from a Methodist minister, (I think South African) John van der Laar who has a web site called [sacredise.com](http://sacredise.com). He explores how the church might respond to the challenge of the Ascension.*

## **Ascension**

We saw his light break through the cloud of glory  
Whilst we were rooted still in time and place,  
As earth became a part of Heaven's story  
And heaven opened to his human face.  
We saw him go and yet we were not parted,  
He took us with him to the heart of things,  
The heart that broke for all the broken-hearted  
Is whole and Heaven-centred now, and sings;  
Sings in the strength that rises out of weakness,  
Sings through the clouds that veil him from our sight,  
Whilst we ourselves become his clouds of witness  
And sing the waning darkness into light;  
His light in us, and ours in him concealed,  
Which all creation waits to see revealed.

Malcolm Guite



## **Ascension for the local church**

In every organisation, every community, every family, every church, power has the potential to turn into a struggle. In every human collective there is the potential for abuse, exploitation and exclusion. But, the Ascension calls us to a different way of being. It begins with a personal recognition of the value that Jesus places on every human being – including ourselves. That Christ would take on our flesh, live our life, die our death, and then rise and take the place of authority over our human world, indicates the extent to which Christ is concerned to change the human system in which only some are valued, and others count for nothing.

Then, celebrating the Ascension calls us to work, in our own small corner of the world, to embody the reign of Christ – the justice, equality, compassion and inclusion that Jesus demonstrated in his life, and that he expresses as Lord of all (not just Lord of some).

This means that we must strive for collaborative leadership in which power is shared and all have the capacity and the facility to participate if they so choose.

This means that we must strive to celebrate all people and their humanity, not just those who are “special” or “important” in some way.

This means that we must learn to value every part of our humanness and teach others to do the same – honouring the beauty and dignity in every person, and seeking to preserve the sacredness in the most intimate of human connections – hospitality, identity, and sexuality.

This means that, as church, the Ascension calls us to be a community of liberation not condemnation, of celebration not judgment, of this-worldly concern and compassion not other-worldly.

## **Intercessions (With thanks to Richard and the Wild Goose website)**

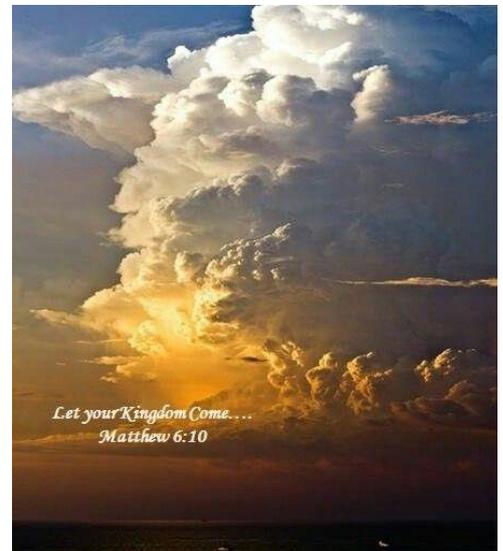
*The Ascension speaks to us of the reign of Christ and his Kingdom; that theme informs these intercessions.*

Let us hold before God all those whom Christ calls to follow him –  
when faith is great and when faith is little;  
when faith is sure and when faith clings by its fingernails;  
when faith sees clearly and when faith gropes;  
when faith reassures and when faith challenges;  
when following is easy and when following brings conflict –  
both those who follow Christ with firm tread and those whose step is less steady –  
that, among God's people, joys may be celebrated and tears may be shed,  
all are welcomed, young and old, seeker and stranger,  
God's Kingdom is both sought and lived,  
and the Good News of Jesus Christ is shared and proclaimed.  
Your Kingdom come. YOUR WILL BE DONE.

Let us hold before God all those to whom Christ offers his Kingdom:  
the abused and the exploited;  
the battered and the bruised;  
the blind and the broken;  
the deaf and the dumb;  
the destitute and the dispirited;  
the feeble and the forgotten; the homeless  
and the hungry; the lame and the lost;  
the lonely and the unwelcome;  
the outcast and the scapegoat;  
the poor and the paralysed;  
the sick and the sorrowful;  
the unlovely and the unloved.  
Your Kingdom come. YOUR WILL BE DONE.

Let us bring to God those conditions in which we long to see  
Christ reign:  
where conflict is a reality and peace but a dream;  
where greed is honoured and generosity is mocked;  
where injustice reigns and justice is trampled underfoot;  
where the powerful are heard and the powerless are ignored;  
where people are discriminated against because of race, creed and gender.  
where the earth is abused;  
where historic hate lives;  
where honest work is derided or denied.  
Your Kingdom come. YOUR WILL BE DONE.

Give to us, O God,  
a vision of your kingdom,



a glimpse of your glory,  
an openness to your rule,  
and your spirit to guide us.  
Hear us, we pray,  
through Christ, the risen and ascended one. Amen

David Hamflett (a download from Wild Goose)

### **A short Spiritual Communion**

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.



Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.

O God,  
help me to trust you,  
help me to know that you are with me,  
help me to believe that nothing  
can separate me from your love  
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*You may like to access Bread is Broken – words by Richard, music by Nigel, sung by the Lapford Singers.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-WUE5nrlw4&feature=youtu.be>

*Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say*

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits you have given me,  
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.  
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,  
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
may I know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen. *(after the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester)*

### **Post-Communion Prayer**

Eternal God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life:  
grant us to walk in his way, to rejoice in his truth and to share his risen life;  
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever. Amen.

## Closing Prayers

Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Ascension takes us into uncharted territory,  
not quite knowing what is to come next.  
Whatever the next days bring,  
may we see more hope than fear,  
gain more sense of being together than being apart,  
find more doors opening than closing.

Your power of resurrection life is greater than we can fathom:  
may it be visible through and among us,  
even in these days,  
even in our scattered places,  
even in the midst of the mystery.  
In the power of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Adapted from prayers in revgalsblogpals.org*

God who commands us to love, God who remains God with us: your answer, your solution, your remedy for our ills is not a product we can hold or a lesson we can recite. It is a life, a story, an ongoing relationship. It is a life that lives on for us. It is a story we can be a part of. It is a relationship we enter with you and with others. Help us remain together in love, responsive to one another's needs, and changed by our one-ness in you. Amen

*(From the Corymeela Community – thanks to Doreen for this.)*

Christ is risen  
Christ is risen indeed  
Alleluia

go in peace:  
thanks be to God. Amen

**Night Prayer is on the next page**



## Night Prayer



If you are able to do so, you might wish to light a candle near a window.

### Opening prayer:

Spirit of the Risen Christ,  
As the lamps light up the evening,  
Shine in our hearts and kindle in us the fire of your love.

As light-seekers we come, O God, and we rejoice in Your light; May our adoration open a window, that Your light may flood through.

As hope-seekers we come, O God, and we celebrate Your gift of hope; Capture us as we worship, and make us prisoners of hope.

As Christ-followers we come, O God, and we open ourselves to Christ's life; Change us as we encounter Your glory, that we may carry Your light into the world.

*Adapted from Food for the Road: John van de Laar*

### Developed from Psalm 134

In the silent hours of night bless the Lord.

O come bless the Lord, all you who serve the Lord,  
who stand in the house of the Lord,  
in the courts of the house of our God.

Lift up your hands to the holy place  
and bless the Lord through the night.

May the Lord bless you from Zion,  
he who made both heaven and earth.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever.  
Amen.

### **Reflection on the Ascension by Thomas Merton**

(The Ascension) is the feast of silence and interior solitude when we go up to live in heaven with Jesus: for he takes us there, after he has lived a little while on earth among us. This is the grace of Ascension Day: to be taken up into the heaven of our own souls, the point of immediate contact with God. To rest on this quiet peak, in the darkness that surrounds God. To live there through all trials and all business with the “tranquil God who makes all things tranquil.”



### **Prayer for others**

I lay before God:

the hopes and needs of all who find themselves in the dark places of the world;  
the hopes and dreams of all who have lost their purpose and vision;  
the hopes and courage of all who serve and uplift others;

We praise You for the light that shatters the darkness, the hope that rises from the ashes, the life that returns from the grave And we pray that they may fill the earth, as dawn fills the sky. Amen

### **Evening collects**

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this life may rest in your eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

God our Father, by whose mercy  
the world turns safely into darkness and returns again to light:  
we place in your hands our unfinished tasks,  
our unsolved problems, and our unfulfilled hopes,  
knowing that only what you bless will prosper.  
To your love and protection  
we commit each other and all those we love,  
knowing that you alone are our sure defender,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Commission and blessing**

We go into the world as hope-carriers. We thank you, Lord, for re-igniting the flame of hope within us, for filling our hearts with light and evicting the darkness, and for giving a new vision of your glory. Amen.

We go in the name of Christ, in the love of God and in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

May the risen Lord Jesus bless us.  
May he watch over us and renew us  
as he renews the whole of creation.  
May our hearts and lives echo his love.

*You might like to access*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAt7V1xMXWQ>

for 'Veni Sancti Spiritus – (Come Holy Spirit) a Taizé chant to prepare us for Pentecost