



Ascension Day Service

21st May 2020

God has gone up with a shout,
the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

Psalm 47.5

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you
and also with you.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, for forty days we have been celebrating with joyful hearts the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, his bursting from the tomb and his defeat of the power of sin and death. He appeared to his disciples many times and told them about the kingdom of God.

Today we recall how he left this earth and returned to his Father, ascending into heaven to take his throne over all dominions and powers. Trusting in his reign over all creation, and submitting to his kingly yet loving rule, let us hear the story of his parting.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 1 verses 4 to 11

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. 'This', he said, 'is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Seeing we have a great high priest who has passed through the heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us offer him the praise worthy of his name.

The Gloria

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.

**Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.**

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,

Lord God, Lamb of God,

you take away the sin of the world:

have mercy on us;

you are seated at the right hand of the Father:

receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,

you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

The Collect

Let us pray that our risen and ascended Lord will lead us to eternal life.

Silence is kept.

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.

Amen.

Canticle

All nations shall come and worship you, O Christ, and share in the feast of your kingdom.

Great and wonderful are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty.

Just and true are your ways, O ruler of the nations.

Who shall not revere and praise your name, O Lord? for you alone are holy.

All nations shall come and worship in your presence: for your just dealings have been revealed.

Revelation 15.3,4

**To the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

All nations shall come and worship you, O Christ, and share in the feast of your kingdom.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Go and make disciples of all nations, says the Lord.

Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

cf Matthew 28.19,20

Alleluia.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

A Reading from the Gospel of Luke chapter 24 verses 44 to 53.

44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." 45

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

The Ascension of Jesus

50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Today we are celebrating Ascension day. the day when Jesus was taken up into heaven. This happened 40 days after he rose from the dead on that first Easter Sunday.

As we heard in our reading - In Acts Chapter 1: verses 4-8, Jesus and the disciples engage in a dialogue. (These are the only words Jesus speaks in the book of Acts so they are of special significance.) Jesus begins the conversation by instructing the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they receive the promise from God, that is the gift of the Holy Spirit as told early in the Gospel of Luke when John the Baptist prophesied that one was coming who would baptise with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16).

Luke will tell how this promise has been fulfilled in the story of Pentecost in Acts Chapter 2, but here in this exchange the disciples do not fully understand and are confused, they ask whether this will also be the time in which Christ restores the kingdom of Israel. Jesus, however, focuses their attention back on the gift of the Holy Spirit and its results: he says "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Notice that Jesus does not say 'you must go and tell' like he would give an instruction. Instead, it is a declaration. Jesus declares a fact that will occur in the future. "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." And, that is how the book of Acts plays out - geographically in exactly the way Jesus prophesies. "In Jerusalem" (Acts Ch's: 1-7) The Apostles minister first in Jerusalem. Then due to persecution there and following the martyrdom of Stephen, the Way is carried outward to surrounding areas and "Samaria" (as told in Acts Ch's: 8-12). And finally (in Acts Ch's: 12-28), through Paul, Barnabas, and others the Word is taken to other parts of the Roman Empire until finally Paul the Apostle is awaiting trial before the Emperor in Rome, (considered at that time to be) "the ends of the earth".

Then in Acts 1:9-11, Luke tells of Jesus' departure into the clouds, the clouds from which Jesus promised he would return.

In the early church the celebration of Christ ascending to the right hand of God to judge the living and the dead was one of giving praise for the divinity of Christ's rule over the powers and principalities of the world. In addition to celebration, this passage in Acts offers a different

perspective on the Ascension. The stories of the Incarnation and the Resurrection emphasise Christ's pending return. The story of the Ascension emphasises our Lord Jesus' transcendence to a different place, a special place which is accessible to all who believe in him and who strive to live as he did. When I was preparing this 'talk' I read quite a few descriptions of what heaven is or at least what some people think it is. For me it is a special place that is indescribable. During these 'lockdown' times it is another symbol of hope that we can all aspire and pray for.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, thank you for the Ascension story and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We give thanks for the hope that is Jesus Christ and we await his coming again. Give us strength to worship you, to reflect your glory back into this world and to live our lives more like Jesus so that we too may celebrate your love in heaven when the time is right. We pray this prayer on this Ascension day, and forevermore, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

Offertory

Blessed be God, by whose grace creation is renewed,
by whose love heaven is opened, by whose mercy we offer our sacrifice of praise.
Blessed be God for ever.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us join our prayers with those of our Saviour Christ, seeking the Father's blessing and the gifts of the Spirit.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
you have exalted your Son Christ Jesus to your right hand, and made him the head over all things for his body the Church:
hear us as we pray for the Church throughout the world ...

Make us and all your people receptive to the gifts he pours upon us,
that we may use them to your glory, and the building up of the body of Christ.
Lord, in your mercy:
hear our prayer.

Lord God Almighty, the Ancient of Days,
you have given your Son all authority in heaven and on earth:
hear us as we pray for the world he came to redeem ...

Grant that we may know even in this time the things that make for peace,
and may strive for the reconciliation of all people in his kingdom of justice and love.
Lord, in your mercy:
hear our prayer.

Father of all, whose Son has promised to be with us always, to the end of the age:
hear us as we pray for those among whom we live and work ...

Grant that we may be so aware of his presence with us, that people may take note of us, that we have been with Jesus.
Lord, in your mercy:
hear our prayer.

O God our Redeemer, whose Son ever lives to make intercession for us:
hear us as we pray for those in any kind of need ...

May he who has borne our infirmities strengthen and heal them, that they may find grace to help in time of need, and rejoice in his salvation.
Lord, in your mercy:
hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, whose Son has borne our humanity into the heavenly realms,
and gone before us to prepare a place for us:
hear us as we remember before you those whose earthly sojourn is over, and whose life is now hidden in him with you ...

Make us joyful and expectant, that at his coming with all his own we too may go forth to meet him, and share in his eternal joy.
Merciful Father,
accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Looking for the coming of his kingdom, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (1.12,13a,14)

Then the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying. They were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Silence is kept.

Responsory

As we wait in silence,

make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we listen to your word,

make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we worship you in majesty,

make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we long for your refreshing,

make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we long for your renewing,

make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we long for your equipping,

make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we long for your empowering,

make us ready for your coming Spirit.

The Blessing

God the Father, who has given to his Son the name above every name, strengthen us to proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord.

Amen.

God the Son, who is our great high priest passed into the heavens, plead for us at the right hand of the Father.

Amen.

God the Holy Spirit, who pours out his abundant gifts upon the Church, make us faithful servants of Christ our King.

Amen.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always.

Amen.

The Dismissal

Waiting expectantly for the promised Holy Spirit, go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia.

Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.