

twelvebaskets



ASCENSION SUNDAY C

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Ascension - Year C
29th May 2022



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

300 STF – Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia! OR

364 STF – O for a thousand tongues to sing

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

35 STF – The trumpets sound, the angels sing OR

331 STF – King of kings, majesty

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

348 STF – He is Lord, he is Lord OR

338 STF – There is a Redeemer

What are you being called to?

Hymn:

293 STF – All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord OR

332 STF – Lord, I lift your name on high

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

319 STF – Christ triumphant, ever reigning OR

313 STF – Thine be the glory

Blessing

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Many more resources and inspiration for this week's lectionary, leading worship and other church use are available on www.theworshipcloud.com.

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Call to worship

God of all grace,
We come to you, a people seeking connection, seeking meaning, seeking hope.
God who comes amongst us,
Make yourself known to us today and show us how to engage in your mission all around us.
In the name of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, we come.
Come amongst us, O Lord.

Amen.¹

Hymn:

300 STF – Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia! OR
364 STF – O for a thousand tongues to sing

Opening Prayers

Risen Lord,
As we gather to remember when you ascended into heaven,
We ask that you open our minds to understand your scriptures.

Guide us into a deeper understanding of your words.
Help us to draw on your Spirit as we live our lives as your beloved children.

Risen Lord,
You lifted your hands to bless as a final act before your ascension.

Help us to gladly receive your blessing.

Give us opportunities to share the joy you have ignited within us,
And may our praise to you be loud and plentiful.

Risen Lord,
You have prepared a way for us.

Help us to trust in your unfailing love and goodness,
And be ready to offer others the same compassion and care that we have received.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Sheila Matthews

All Age Talk

It's a moment in time – or when time stands still for just a bit. Jesus' followers stand, their eyes following his body as it rises into the clouds and out of sight. They remain staring at the sky. It's an ending, but an ending with the promise of a new beginning. Once again, Jesus' friends find themselves in a time of waiting, a limbo, wondering 'what now?'

Have you noticed how, in the gospels, significant things happen on hilltops?

There's the Transfiguration – three disciples get a glimpse of Christ's glory on a hilltop. But then they are told to keep quiet about what they've seen (at least for the time being); a waiting time – 'when can we talk about this? What do we do with this experience?'

And then there's Jesus standing on a hilltop looking over Jerusalem, his heart breaking and lamenting over the place and people he loves who reject his love. He knows that as he descends that hill into Jerusalem he is walking towards his death; but he doesn't turn away... he walks towards it.

Another hill outside the city; a hill littered with crosses. The women who followed Jesus stand below their crucified Lord; the disciples are either scattered or watching from afar. 'What now?' they ask themselves, in desperation.

And a few short weeks later, the disciples follow the risen Jesus to another hilltop. They've spent these weeks seeing him, talking with him, listening to him. Their minds still buzzing from all that has happened – death defeated. 'What now?' they ask, thinking that now God might do the promised thing of bringing about the new heaven and new earth, restoring the kingdom of Israel. But, not yet, says Jesus. The timing for that isn't for you to know, he says. In the meantime, you're my witnesses.

That's what you're to do now. And with this commission and the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is lifted into heaven.³

Hymn:

35 STF – The trumpets sound, the angels sing OR

331 STF – King of kings, majesty

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

³ Taken from What Now? A Reflection for Ascension by Elizabeth Dunning

Reflections on the reading

Last year, as part of the Big Church Sing, our friends at All We Can put together the a retelling of some of the key events of the Easter season, including the Ascension. *Featuring Joanna Adeyinka-Burford from Cbeebies, that re-telling features in a short video.*

If possible, play the Vine Video (downloadable from here: <https://theworshipcloud.com/view/store/twelvebaskets-vine-video-ascension-sunday-16th-may-2021>)

The ascension is one of the great moments in the Jesus narrative, where we see many witnesses experience a miraculous moment, and a calling – a calling to follow.

Let's listen to N T Wright as he unpicks what this momentous event might mean for us:

First, it is obvious that without the resurrection of Jesus the evangelists would never have had a story to tell. Thousands of young Jews were crucified by the Romans. Very few of them are even mentioned in our historical sources, except as a grisly footnote. Even those who think the evangelists were in fact very clever inventors of large-scale fictions designed to revive a Jesus movement that might not otherwise have survived the death (and continuing deadness, so to speak) of its founder are bound to admit that even within these cleverly designed myths the resurrection plays the vital role in opening the question up again, so that what looked like defeat, like yet another failure of a kingdom-dream, was in fact a victory. The resurrection, in short, is presented by the evangelists not as a 'happy ending' after an increasingly sad and gloomy tale, but as the event that demonstrated that Jesus' execution really had dealt the deathblow to the dark forces that had stood in the way of God's new world, God's 'kingdom' of powerful creative and restorative love, arriving 'on earth as in heaven'.

That is why the bodily resurrection matters in a way that it never quite does, even to the devout who insist that they believe it, if all one is interested in is a kingdom 'not of this world'.

The resurrection is, from Mark's point of view, the moment when God's kingdom 'comes in power'. From John's point of view, it is the launching of the new creation, the new Genesis.

From Matthew's point of view, it brings Jesus into the position for which he was always destined, that of the world's rightful Lord, sending out his followers (as a new Roman emperor might send out his emissaries, but with methods that match the message) to call the world to follow him and learn his way of being human. From Luke's point of view, the resurrection is the moment when Israel's Messiah 'comes into his glory', so that 'repentance for the forgiveness of sins' can now be announced to all the world as the way of life, indeed, as they say in Acts, as The Way. Once we put kingdom and cross together in the manner we have, it is not difficult to see how the resurrection fits closely with that great combined reality.

It is the resurrection that declares that the cross was a victory, not a defeat. It therefore announces that God has indeed become king on earth as in heaven. To understand the Ascension requires that we recall what was said about Israel's

Temple theology. The Temple was the intersection between heaven and earth; but now the place of intersection is Jesus himself, who is equally at home in either or both of the twin halves of God's good creation. Luke's Ascension story (John's hint of one, in Jesus' reply to Mary Magdalene in 20.17, shows that he could have told one, had he chosen to do so) is commonly misunderstood, but its proper emphases ought to be clear. Heaven and earth are now joined in the person – in the risen body! – of Jesus himself. But if the Temple was always the sign and the means of the true theocracy, then the Temple-in-person, that is, Jesus himself, is now that sign. The one who sits in heaven is the one who rules on earth.

He therefore sends out his followers, equipped by his own spirit (if the Ascension locates a part of 'earth' in 'heaven', Pentecost sends the breath of heaven to earth), to celebrate his sovereignty over the world and make it a reality through the founding of communities rescued by his love, renewed by his power, and loyal to his name. Jesus' followers, equipped with his spirit, are to become in themselves, individually and together, little walking temples, rescued themselves from sin through Jesus' death, and with the living presence of God going with them and in them.

No wonder the great controversies in Acts 7, 17 and 19 and then the sequence of trials in chapters 20—26 all concern temples. Temple and theocracy are joined at the hip in their new form in the Jesus movement every bit as much as in ancient paganism, on the one hand, or ancient Judaism, on the other. Now, however, because of the cross, theocracy itself has been radically redefined. As Paul would see and celebrate, Jesus has come to his rightful place, claiming the allegiance of every creature in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. But he has come to that place and maintains it by, and only by, his humility and self-giving love.

When, therefore, at the start of Acts, the disciples ask Jesus whether this is the time for him to 'restore the kingdom to Israel' (1.6), his answer is not (as people often suppose) a 'no'. It is a 'yes'. As so often, however, it is a 'yes but':

'It's not your business to know about times and dates,' replied Jesus. 'The father has placed all that under his own direct authority. What will happen, though, is that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. Then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth.'

And that 'witness', as Luke has made abundantly clear, is not a matter of 'telling people about your new religious experience' or of informing them that there is now a new prospect of a much better other-worldly destiny than anything the bleak pagan world had to offer. The 'witness' of Jesus' followers is the message that there is now 'another king, Jesus' (Acts 17.7). It is the witness according to which the temples that presently exist, whether in Jerusalem, Athens, Ephesus or anywhere else, are now to be seen as at best redundant (Acts 7) and at worst a blasphemous category mistake (Acts 17; 19). Jesus is the true Temple, now ruling the world as the one who was crucified; his followers, as Paul would explain more thoroughly, constitute the fuller version of the same thing, so that the dwelling of the living God is now spread increasingly across and around the world, again evidenced not by coercive or violent power, but by the rule of love.⁴

⁴ Taken from *How God Became King* by Tom Wright

Hymn:

348 STF – He is Lord, he is Lord OR

338 STF – There is a Redeemer

What are you being called to?

So where does all that we have reflected on regarding Ascension leave us?

How can we address the question of the major misunderstandings that have dogged the footsteps of Christian faith for so long? And, since the kingdom is (as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4.20) not about talk, but about power, how might this begin to translate into the lives of real Christian communities, like the one we are part of here? To put it another way, if this is really and truly the story the four evangelists are telling, is there any way we can retrieve it for ourselves? How might we become true gospel readers, gospel pray-ers, gospel liverers in our own day?

If it is true, in some sense that we no doubt still find perplexing, that God really did become king in and through Jesus of Nazareth and supremely through the victory of his crucifixion and the launching of his new world in the resurrection, how might we be brought into this story? What might it look like?⁵

Spend a few moments reflecting on these 'big questions' together in small groups, or on your own.

- How can we live out the gospel in our own lives?
- How does the story of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension change how we live today?
- Are we, as a church, living up to the possibilities of this story? Are we sharing this story widely and passionately enough?

Hymn:

293 STF – All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord OR

332 STF – Lord, I lift your name on high

Prayers of intercession

Lord unseen, yet ever near, your presence may we feel.

We pray for all those whose lives are clouded by fear and doubt and fear, for all who have lost faith, for all whose vision has become blurred.

We pray that the church may proclaim and reveal your presence and glory,

That the church may help to lift up the fallen and restore sight to the blind.

We pray for those with strong vision and faith, that they may guide us to you.

Christ, King of Glory,

Lift our hearts and mind.

We pray for all who have been separated from love ones by war, illness or circumstance.

For those who are searching for loved ones, for all who are lonely and deserted. We remember those whose lives are clouded by tyranny and oppression,

All who are anxious about their future and their loved ones.

⁵ Taken from How God Became King by Tom Wright

Christ, King of Glory,
Lift our hearts and mind.

We give thanks that you are with us always.
May we be at home with you in our homes;
Let our dwellings reflect your love and glory.
We pray for our families and neighbours,
For all our friends, especially those we seldom see.
Christ, King of Glory,
Lift our hearts and mind.

We remember all who feel broken-hearted or dis-spirited,
All who are down and need someone to uplift them.
We pray for all who are chronically ill and all who care for the terminally ill.
We remember friends and loved ones in their troubles.
Christ, King of Glory,
Lift our hearts and mind.

We rejoice that you have ascended into glory and have opened the kingdom of
heaven to all believers.
As you came to lift us out of darkness into eternal light, and out of death into life
eternal
We pray for all who are bereaved and mourn.
Christ, King of Glory,
Lift our hearts and mind.

Amen.⁶

We will now take up the offering.

Blessing the offering

God of all grace, on this Ascension Sunday, we give thanks for all we have received,
and we offer these gifts to you.
May we, and all who are responsible for the stewardship of these gifts, discern how
they, and each of us, can play our part in bringing about a better, safer, fairer world.
May your Kingdom come. May your will be done, O Lord.
Amen.⁷

Hymn:

319 STF – Christ triumphant, ever reigning OR
313 STF – Thine be the glory

⁶ Taken from Glimpses of Glory by David Adam

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Blessing

May Christ the Lord, who lived, who died, who was raised from the dead and who has ascended into heaven, travel with you.

May the Christ who is amongst, around and within us strengthen you in your calling, and hold you in your grief.

Amen.⁸

⁸ Additional prayers by Tim Baker