

**Seventh Sunday of Easter (Sunday after Ascension)  
Prayers, Readings and Reflection  
24 May 2020**

**Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

*You are invited to 'awake and sing of him who died for thee' with the Ascension hymn 'Crown him with many crowns':*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7OCs0d\\_4vM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7OCs0d_4vM)



**COLLECT**

O God the king of glory,  
you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ  
with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven:  
we beseech you, leave us not comfortless,  
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us  
and exalt us to the place  
where our Saviour Christ is gone before,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**FIRST READING**

**Acts 1:6–14**

*After Jesus' resurrection, he met for one last time with his disciples.)*

6 When the apostles had come together, they asked him,  
'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?'

7 He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods  
that the Father has set by his own authority.

8 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.'

9 When he had said this, as they were watching,  
he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

10 While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven,  
suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

11 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.'

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount  
called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath  
day's journey away.

13 When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were  
staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew  
and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of  
James.



14 All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

## PSALM

## Psalm 68:1-10, 32-end

1 Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered; let those who hate him flee before him.

2 Let them vanish like smoke when the wind drives it away; as the wax melts at the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

3 But let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; let them also be merry and joyful.

4 Sing to God, sing praises to his name; exalt him who rides upon the heavens; Yahweh is his name, rejoice before him!

5 Father of orphans, defender of widows, God in his holy habitation!

6 God gives the solitary a home and brings forth prisoners into freedom; but the rebels shall live in dry places.

7 O God, when you went forth before your people, when you marched through the wilderness,

8 The earth shook and the skies poured down rain, at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

9 You sent a gracious rain, O God, upon your inheritance; you refreshed the land when it was weary.

10 Your people found their home in it; in your goodness, O God, you have made provision for the poor.

33 Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord.

34 He rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens; he sends forth his voice, his mighty voice.

35 Ascribe power to God; his majesty is over Israel; his strength is in the skies.

36 How wonderful is God in his holy places!

the God of Israel giving strength and power to his people! Blessèd be God!

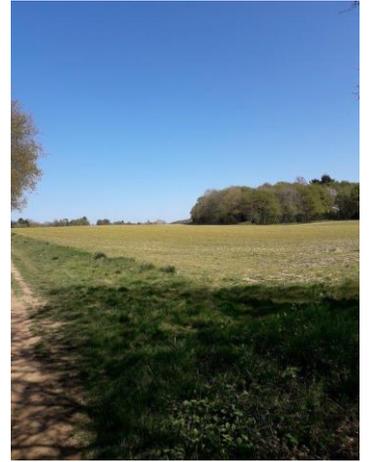
*You may like to continue in worship with Graham Kendrick's setting of some of these verses 'Let God arise': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnCmq9Xhku0>*

Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered  
and let those who hate him flee before him.

Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered  
and let those who hate him flee away.

But let the righteous be glad (the righteous be glad),  
let them exult before God (let them exult before God),  
let them rejoice with gladness (O let them rejoice),  
building up a highway for the King,  
we go in the name of the Lord, let the shout go up in the name of the Lord.

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## SECOND READING

1 Peter 4:12–14; 5:6-11

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

13 But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.

14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.

7 Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

8 Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour.

9 Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

10 And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.

11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

## GOSPEL

John 17:1–11

*(At the Last Supper, the night before he died, Jesus prayed)*

1 Jesus looked up to heaven and said,

'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you,

2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.

5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6 I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world.

They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you;

8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.

10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.'



*Praise the risen, ascended Christ, who continues to pray for us in the presence of God, with the contemporary hymn 'Christ triumphant'*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnsbOCH6S1Y>

## **REFLECTION**

Reflecting on the ascension of Christ this year, I found myself once again celebrating Jesus' return to his rightful place, finally freed from all the limitations to which he had subjected himself when he came to live a human life. Perhaps the fact that we are having to live under certain restrictions at the moment focussed my mind. Jesus, in order to enter fully into our experience, to share our life and death, had submitted to being restricted, even isolated one could say, to one particular locality, at one particular point in time, in one particular community and culture, within the confines of a human body and nature, distanced from his heavenly home and Father, not just for a few months but for thirty-three years. And this was he whose "hands had flung stars into space" as a contemporary hymn puts it; he who in the beginning was with God and was God and through whom all things were made, to echo the famous opening verses of John's gospel. Now he is risen, ascended, glorified; our Lord has taken his throne again and we bow down and worship.

And there's more: not only has Christ ascended but, in him, our humanity is also carried up into the very heart of God. He does not discard his human body, sloughing it off like a dead skin, but ascends, as he rose, in his human body, taking our human flesh and experience with him. It is the greatest possible (although it still seems impossible) demonstration that, far from despising our human nature, with all its weaknesses, needs and desires, Jesus makes it a part of God, reuniting and reconciling us with our maker.

These twin aspects, the glory of Christ's divinity and the transformation of our humanity as he catches us up in that glory, are the substance of our celebration of The Ascension as a major feast. Today, however, the Sunday after Ascension and before Pentecost has a rather different feel. The excitement dies down and we wait - wait for the feast of the Holy Spirit. For the disciples it must have been a strange time, an inbetween time: Jesus had finally left them after all the excitement of his resurrection appearances and before them lay the great future of building the new community of Christ, taking the message of his love to all peoples everywhere. But first they had to wait for the Spirit to come and empower them.

And it is reflecting on this hiatus, this inbetween time, alongside the strange inbetween time we ourselves are experiencing during this pandemic, that has made me think what a risk Jesus took - one among many, of course, for the incarnation itself was the biggest risk one could imagine. But then to leave again and, moreover, to leave his work and ministry in the hands of the disciples, people who not long before had denied and abandoned him, in addition to persistently failing to understand what it was all about anyway - that is a pretty big risk to take, don't you think? To leave, trusting these people to carry on his work, to take his gospel of unconditional love across the world, to build his kingdom of justice and wholeness,

and not these people alone but those who would come after them, which today means us, yes, you and me! A very big risk indeed.

So suddenly a third aspect of the ascension emerges: in leaving and returning to his place with the Father, Jesus entrusts us with the ongoing work of establishing his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven: preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed... He really believes we both *can* and *will* do this, that it is safe to leave it in our hands. An unparalleled act of faith in us, who frequently show so little faith in him.

It *is* a risk. It could backfire. Certainly, over the centuries and in our own age, we can see how often it *has* backfired, how that trust has been betrayed and that faith disappointed. Yet we can also see many, many people in whom that trust has been gloriously rewarded, people who have made a difference, who have transformed their own life and that of others through the love and life of Christ. Both responses to Jesus' trust have been brought into sharp focus by the current crisis.

So what about you? Would you consider yourself high, medium or low risk in Christ's venture of faith and trust? Hold up your hands in front of you and look at them. In those hands he has placed the stewardship of his creation, the establishment of justice and peace in all nations, the care of the weak and suffering, and the gift of life in all its fullness. How do *your* hands bear those gifts and the responsibilities which accompany them? In those hands he has placed his trust.

Just think: you hold the hopes and dreams of God himself in your fingers! You *could* just let them slip through and fall to the ground. You could clasp them to you and keep them to and for yourself. You could crush them, twist them, destroy them, throw them away. Or you could hold them gently and reverently, nurture them, weave them into the fabric of your own being and doing, carry them with you into the world and share them with as many people as possible. It is up to you. God has taken a big risk with you but he has faith in you not to let him down. And he has such love for you that, when you do in fact let him down, you are invited to come back to him with empty hands that he might fill them afresh and send you back out with new strength and confidence.



And always remember, it is not up to you alone, however alone some of us may be feeling at the moment.

Firstly, Jesus prays for you. Yes, I know we are more used to praying *to him* but in this morning's gospel we heard part of *his* first prayer *for us* and he continues to pray for us: we are never out of his thoughts or beyond the reach of his care.

Secondly, as we will celebrate next Sunday, he sends us his Spirit: his presence with us as counsellor, advocate, teacher, guide and companion, equipping us with the gifts we need and helping us to grow and bear fruit.

Thirdly, he calls others with us and it is together that we become his body in the world; together we form a new

community, a community in which we can live and learn and grow, a community to which others can come and be safe and be healed and renewed.

In that prayer in John's Gospel, Jesus prays for his followers: 'Now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.' A reminder that we may be physically apart but love keeps us connected and holds us in life. May you know that love of God this week and be strengthened by the trust he places in you, the hopes and plans he has for you.

*Click here for The Choir of Wells Cathedral, under the direction of Malcolm Archer, performing 'God is Gone Up', Gerald Finzi's beautiful Ascension Day anthem for choir and organ that takes its lyrics from Edward Taylor's 'Meditation Twenty' and the jubilant 47th psalm: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrs5XR9Pd7k>.*

'God is gone up with a triumphant shout!  
The Lord with sounding Trumpets' melodies:  
Sing Praise, sing Praise, sing Praise,  
sing Praises out, unto our King sing praise  
seraphicwise!  
Lift up your Heads, ye lasting Doors, they sing,  
and let the King of Glory enter in.  
Methinks I see Heaven's sparkling courtiers fly,  
in flakes of Glory down him to attend,  
And hear Heart-cramping notes of Melody  
surround his Chariot as it did ascend;  
Mixing their Music, making ev'ry string more  
to enravish as they this tune sing.'



## **POST COMMUNION**

Eternal God, giver of love and power,  
your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world  
to preach the gospel of his kingdom:  
confirm us in this mission,  
and help us to live the good news we proclaim;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **BLESSING**

Christ our ascended King  
pour upon you the abundance of his gifts  
and bring you to reign with him in glory;  
And the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
be with you this day and always. Amen.

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