

Prepared by The Revd Ken Howcroft

## The Sunday after Ascension

### Preparing to Worship

*We are coming towards the end of the Easter Season, which ends at Pentecost (Whit Sunday) next week. Today is the Seventh Sunday of Easter. It is as if we are hanging between the Ascension (which was this last Thursday, 14 May) and Pentecost. If the Ascension points to the ultimate goal or destination of resurrection life (being completely at one with God), Pentecost points to the energy of resurrection life which empowers us to make the journey and joins us together to support each other in making it. These things are hard to contemplate. They take us to the edge of our understanding and beyond. It is hard to picture them or find words to describe them. They leave us with lots of questions. As we come to worship, we can only begin by being honest and admitting that to God (and ourselves).*

What are we doing here? **We are looking for Jesus.**

What are we doing here? **We have questions to ask.**

What are we doing here? **We seek hope; we seek healing.**

What are we doing here? **We have heard God calling our names.**

### Hymn

1 Hail the day that sees him rise, *Alleluia!*  
ravished from our wistful eyes! *Alleluia!*  
Christ, awhile to mortals given, *Alleluia!*  
reascends his native heaven: *Alleluia!*

2 There the glorious triumph waits: *Alleluia!*  
lift your heads, eternal gates; *Alleluia!*  
wide unfold the radiant scene; *Alleluia!*  
take the King of Glory in! *Alleluia!*

3 Him though highest heaven receives, *Alleluia!*  
still he loves the earth he leaves; *Alleluia!*  
though returning to his throne, *Alleluia!*  
still he calls the world his own: *Alleluia!*

4 See! He lifts his hands above; *Alleluia!*  
see! He shows the prints of love; *Alleluia!*  
hark! His gracious lips bestow *Alleluia!*  
blessings on his Church below: *Alleluia!*

5 Master, parted from our sight, *Alleluia!*  
high above the azure height, *Alleluia!*  
grant our hearts to you may rise, *Alleluia!*  
following you beyond the skies: *Alleluia!*

6 Cast ourselves before your throne, *Alleluia!*  
here our heaven of heavens to own, *Alleluia!*  
there we shall with you remain, *Alleluia!*  
partners of your endless reign: *Alleluia!*

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 300

### Prayer

In this moment, in this place, at this time, here and now, Lord: **We worship you.**

Your word lifts us beyond ourselves to new heights and depths, Lord: **We praise you.**

For the prayers that draw us to you, Lord: **We praise you.**

For the hymns that echo the faith of the generations and speak to the core of our being, Lord:  
**We praise you.**

For the words of the Bible that speak new truths and heighten our awareness of the truth, Lord:  
**We praise you.**

For the moments of silence that feel filled to overflowing with your presence, Lord:

**We praise you, we worship and adore you. Amen.**

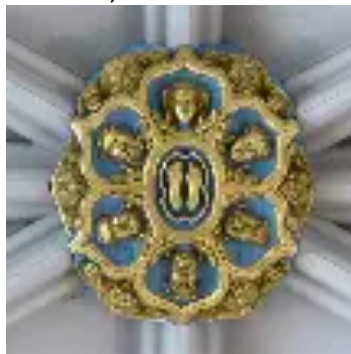
Lift us, hearts, minds and wills, into the joy of your divine presence,

that seeing you as you are, we may worship you as we ought; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Reading: Acts 1:6-14

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' <sup>7</sup> He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> 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.' <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> 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.'

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.



*If you go into York Minster and crane your neck to look up, you will see a series of ceiling bosses at the junctions of the tracery. They portray scenes from the life of Jesus. Then you come to the one pictured above. What can it be? You can make out six upturned faces, but what is in the centre? Eventually the penny drops (or someone tells you!). They are the soles of two bare feet. It is the Ascension! The faces are looking at Jesus vanishing from their sight.*

*Well ... how would you sculpt or draw it? How would you picture or describe it if you were those disciples? What would you be feeling if you were there? You thought you had lost your beloved Master when he was barbarically executed. It was only recently that you discovered him back with you, raised to life again. Then suddenly you lose sight of him again. He disappears. He is taken away. It must have been like saying your final goodbye to someone you love as they die. You start to wonder what has been the point of it all. There is nothing left. You have nothing to show for it.*

*Yet rather than feeling bereft and being distraught the disciples in the story (who are standing in for you and me) go back to Jerusalem and spend their time in prayer, apparently waiting calmly. Maybe the fact that he had said that he would be raised after being crucified and had indeed come back to them, meant that they were more inclined to believe it when they are told that he will come back after this disappearance as well.*

*But where has he gone? He has gone to heaven. In other words, he has gone to God. And he has promised to return to them in the power of God's love.*

## Prayer

Forgive us, God, for the times:

when we should have lifted our eyes to look up to you, but have not been alert;

when we know we should be ready for whatever life throws at us, but are not;

when we try to cling to you, but only separate our spiritual being from the secular world.

Lord, in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

## Hymn

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 I know that my Redeemer lives —<br>what joy the blest assurance gives !<br>He lives, he lives, who once was dead ;<br>he lives, my everlasting Head !  | 3 He lives, and grants me daily breath ;<br>he lives, and I shall conquer death ;<br>he lives, my mansion to prepare ;<br>he lives, to lead me safely there. |
| 2 He lives, to bless me with his love ;<br>he lives, to plead for me above ;<br>he lives, my hungry soul to feed ;<br>he lives, to help in time of need. | 4 He lives, all glory to his name ;<br>he lives, my Saviour, still the same ;<br>what joy the blest assurance gives,<br>I know that my Redeemer lives !      |

Samuel Medley (1738–1799) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 303.

## Gospel reading: John 17:1-11

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

<sup>6</sup> ‘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. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>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.

*John’s Gospel does not relate the events of the Ascension and Pentecost as described in the Acts of the Apostles, but he does show Jesus reflecting on their themes in what he tells his disciples before his crucifixion and then in the prayer in Chapter 17 which he prays aloud in their hearing to God as his Father.*

*Jesus has glorified God in his earthly life, and supremely in his crucifixion. Elsewhere, John’s gospel makes it plain that it is as Jesus is raised up on the cross that he is raised in glory. This is how he has ‘finished the work’ that the Father ‘gave him to do’. It is in the Son glorifying the Father in this way that the Father glorifies the Son. Jesus prays that God will continue to glorify him when he is with him after his earthly life is over and he is no longer physically in the world.*

*Where though does that leave the world? Where does it leave us, here on earth? Jesus says that he has shared with his disciples (and again, by implication and extension, us) whatever can be known in human terms about God and God’s ways, and in knowing him they and we have begun to know the father, because he and the Father are one. Together they and we replace Jesus of Nazareth as God’s special agent or representative on earth. We become a corporate Christ bringing about God’s kingdom of love and justice on earth. [St. Paul’s way of saying that was that we become the ‘body of Christ’]. So Jesus prays that we become one with him as he is one with the Father, and that as a sign of that we become one with each other.*

*All that is mind-blowing. It will take me a life-time or more to understand it. But somewhere deep beneath what I think or believe, I know that it is true. Do you?*

## Prayers of Intercession

Through Christ, who lives for ever to make intercession for us, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear us **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Lift up our hearts to the heavenly places and inspire us to serve you as a royal priesthood:

Lord, hear us **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Let all peoples acknowledge your kingdom and grant on earth the blessing of peace.

Lord, hear us **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Send down upon us the gift of the Spirit and renew your Church with power from on high.

Lord, hear us **Lord, graciously hear us.**

May peace abound and righteousness flourish, that we may help vanquish injustice and wrong.

Lord, hear us **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Help us to proclaim the good news of salvation, and grant us the needful gifts of your grace.

Lord, hear us **Lord, graciously hear us.**

*Offer your own prayers here for situations in the news, people you know etc.*

Let us commend the world, for which Christ prays, to the mercy and protection of God.

Lord, hear us **Lord, graciously hear us.**

## The Lord's Prayer

### Hymn

1 Rejoice, the Lord is King!  
Your Lord and King adore;  
mortals, give thanks, and sing,  
and triumph evermore:

*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;  
rejoice! Again I say: rejoice!*

2 Jesus the Saviour reigns,  
the God of truth and love;  
when he had purged our stains,  
he took his seat above:

3 His kingdom cannot fail,  
he rules both earth and heaven;  
the keys of death and hell  
are to our Jesus given:

4 He sits at God's right hand  
till all his foes submit,  
and bow to his command,  
and fall beneath his feet:

5 Rejoice in glorious hope;  
Jesus the Judge shall come,  
and take his servants up  
to their eternal home:

*We soon shall hear the archangel's voice  
God's trumpet-call shall sound: rejoice!*

Charles Wesley (1707–1788) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 335

**The blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, remain with us always. Amen.**

CCLI Licence 70101

*A thought to leave with you...*

*When I was training for the ministry at Wesley House in Cambridge, the Cambridge Federation of Theological Colleges (of which we were part) used every year to hold a communion service on Ascension Day over the road at one of the two Anglican colleges, Westcott House. Weather permitting, it was open-air in their garden and followed by refreshments. After the blessing there would suddenly be a loud "Wooooosshhhhh" as a huge rocket firework was launched into the sky. Then suddenly, it was gone.*

*At one level, it might have seemed a somewhat corny joke. But the memory and the image have stayed with me. And, like the feet on the ceiling boss, how else better are we to picture these indescribable events in the story of Acts?*