



St Peter's Wolvercote & All Saints Wytham Ascension Day, 21 May 2020

Dear Friends

Welcome to our special midweek mailing this week, with our celebration of Ascension Day. The weather has been a bit windy this week, which intruded a little into our recording— but maybe we could see it as a foretaste of the coming of the Holy Spirit in wind and fire at Pentecost! Meanwhile the birds are still singing – and Rosie the cat is there again joining in with my sermon in the background!

A reminder that we are encouraged to use the nine days from Ascension Day to Pentecost as a special focus for prayer, based on the Lord's Prayer - "Thy Kingdom Come". Resources for this are included in this mailing. And as we think of the disciples, praying together in the upper room in Jerusalem, so our Sunday service will be recorded in the chancel at St Peter's, the place where we would normally meet for midweek Communion, Morning Prayer, and times of silent prayer – an appropriate place for this time of waiting and prayer, looking forward to the Day of Pentecost. Viv will be providing our sermon for this special time.

Meanwhile I hope you are all keeping well and staying safe,

With love and prayers

Charles

Worship for Ascension Day 2020

(For those with access to a computer, the service can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/TCyZ-hGvPNE>)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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

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

The priest introduces the service

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 (1.1-11)

¹In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ 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; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' ⁶ So when they 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.'

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 draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith and make our confession to our heavenly Father.

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart:

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and keep you in life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect Let us pray

Grant, we pray, almighty God, that as we believe your only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens, so we in heart and mind may also ascend and with him continually dwell; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Reading Ephesians 1.15-23

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

For the gift of the Word **Thanks be to God.**

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

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

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke (24.44-53)

Glory to you, O Lord.

⁴⁴ Jesus said to the disciples, '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.' 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 worshipped 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.

The Homily – Revd Charles Draper

The important thing about the Ascension is not the event, but the meaning. It is interesting that only one of the gospel writers gives us the story of the Ascension. St Matthew ends his gospel slightly differently, with those famous words: *“Lo I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28 v 20). Even St Luke is somewhat vague about when the Ascension happened – I don’t think the precise details were important to him.

I think this is quite important – because the Ascension is open to misunderstanding. It can feel like the end of Easter, and that Jesus is going away. Neither of those things are true. I am glad that at St Peter’s we continue to light the Easter candle till Pentecost, and on the Day of Pentecost we symbolically carry it out of the church into the world. That symbolism is perfect.

It is helpful to hold those words of Matthew alongside the Ascension story. *“Lo I am with you always.”* The Ascension is not about Jesus going away – it is the opposite, now he will be with us more, not less. Even in St Luke, in his fairly simple account, this is clear. The Ascension is very clearly linked to the Day of Pentecost, ten days later. Put very simply, it is as if Jesus goes up to heaven to fetch the Holy Spirit he has promised, and ten days later, delivers to his disciples the Holy Spirit he has promised.

That is putting it in rather crude and literalistic language, but it makes the point! And that is why those nine days between Ascension and Pentecost, when the disciples prayed together in Jerusalem, has become a valuable focus for prayer for us today. I warmly support the current initiative *“Thy Kingdom come”* which encourages us to use these nine days as a focus for prayer, based on the Lord’s Prayer, and I would encourage you to join in with this in any way you can.

But I would like to move on now to explore a little more the meaning of the Ascension. There are two principle meanings of the Ascension in the New Testament. The first is that the Ascension represents the exaltation of Jesus to the highest glory. In St Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost, he says that Jesus has been, *“exalted at the right hand of God”* (Acts 2 v 33). As Jesus says in those concluding words of St Matthew’s Gospel: *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”* (Matthew 28 v 18)

This is why it was so important for the early Christians to call Jesus “Lord”. It is put even more strongly in our epistle reading today from Ephesians: *“God...raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet...”* (Ephesians 1 v 20-22)

This is immensely encouraging when we face times of crisis in our lives, and in our church and in our world. Jesus, who has shown himself to be our truest friend, who (although he can be scary at times!) is good and utterly trustworthy, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep - he is the one who has ultimate authority, over any other power that may threaten us.

That is why St Paul can say: *“I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8 v 38-39)

The second principle meaning of the Ascension is that Jesus is released from the limits of a body, and is released from the limits of time and space, and can truly be with us – all of us, all of the time. *“Lo I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

I remember when I was a curate back in the late 80s, taking an assembly at our local church primary school, where the children soon had it worked out! It was a small village school, where they were very ready to put a hand up, and assemblies often turned into discussions. The question arose – what happened after Easter? Where did Jesus go? We agreed that Jesus went back to God. So where is God? I asked. They quickly answered “everywhere”! So if Jesus went back to God, then where is Jesus? It all seemed quite simple. And actually, right.

Our epistle today ends with these words: *“...him who fills all in all.”* (Eph 1 v 3). However, this becomes much clearer in Ephesians 4 v 10, where it says that Jesus, *“ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.”*

This is a simple but amazingly insightful statement about the Ascension. As one commentary puts it: *“The ascension of Christ is thought of, not as an event which removes Christ from the earth, but rather that which sets Christ free from anything that might localise him. It makes him totally available to all people everywhere at all time. There is no part of the universe where Christ is not.”* (“Ephesians” New Century Bible Commentary by C. Leslie Mitton)

It is good to be reminded of this at a time when we are unable to share in Holy Communion. If Jesus is no longer confined to his earthly body, then neither is he confined to the bread and wine of Communion. The idea of “spiritual communion” is right - when we cannot receive the bread and wine of Communion, we are still able just as much to receive Jesus through the Spirit.

This is the “incognito” Jesus, who is present in the world whether he is recognised or not. And he is also the Jesus, who as the commentary says, is available to all of us – and we don’t need the internet or computers for this!

The prayer we use in “spiritual communion” – “Lord Jesus Christ, since I cannot at this time receive communion, I pray you to come into my heart” - is entirely right and appropriate. As it says in John 14 v 23, one of my favourite verses in the Bible: Jesus answered him, *“Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”*

It is our joy that the ascended Jesus is with us in every situation – even *“the valley of the shadow of death”*. It is our immense privilege that he is willing to dwell within us, in our innermost being. However, he will never impose himself on us – he is patient with us, until we are ready, however hesitantly or tentatively, to open the door, and to ask him in.

Amen

The Intercessions prepared by Evelyn Bryant

God, Our Father, we come before you in union with your Son, Jesus, and in the power of your Holy Spirit to offer our praise and thanksgiving and to pray for the coming of your kingdom:

We give thanks for your Church, worldwide, in this diocese and this place and pray that we may be faithful witnesses making known your enduring love for your creation revealed in the reconciliation and forgiveness accomplished in your Son, Jesus whom you have glorified and made head over all. By his promised gift of your Holy Spirit may we come to share his vision of the things and people this world as charged with hope and a future of glory and healing and be enabled to make your loving faithfulness effective, here and now. So we pray for:

National and International leaders, that they may seek peace and justice for all. Grant them wisdom and courage to take decisions which respect the wonder, beauty, diversity and life-sustaining capability of our natural environment, your creation. Enable our generous response to make the changes which can make this possible.

We give thanks and pray for, all who seek to make peace; those who seek to restore the ravages of natural disaster, or human greed and violence and support those suffering as a result.

We give thanks and pray for all dealing with and seeking to contain the current pandemic; especially those caring for the infected, staff in care homes, those assisting people in isolation, housebound or homeless and without resources. Give them resourcefulness, stamina and the support of colleagues, friends and family. We pray for those whose mental health is compromised, those in fear of violence and those anxious about their livelihood. We pray for all who are sick from any cause, be with them and bring them the joy of your salvation.

We remember all who have died, whether from COVID-19 or in other circumstances and all who have been bereaved. As we celebrate the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, your Son, we ask that we may embody vividly and compellingly your undying love for your creation, that the troubled, the oppressed, the disillusioned, the dying and those who mourn may see, hear and receive the good news of our human destiny to glorify and enjoy you for ever, Bring us with them, with Blessed Mary, Peter our patron and all your saints to the joy of your eternal kingdom.

Merciful Father accept these prayers offered in the name of Jesus, the great Amen.

The Peace

Jesus says: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

If you love me, rejoice because I am going to the Father.' Alleluia.

The peace of the Lord be always with you
and also with you.

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.

The Lord is here

His spirit is with us.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good,
our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ the King of glory.
Born of a woman,
he came to the rescue of our human race.
Dying for us,
he trampled death and conquered sin.
By the glory of his resurrection
he opened the way to life eternal
and by his ascension,
gave us the sure hope
that where he is we may also be.

Therefore the universe resounds with Easter joy
and with choirs of angels we sing for ever to your
praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his
friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.
When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness
of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice
made once for all upon the cross.
Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of
salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith.

Christ has died:

Christ is risen:

Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.
Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with Blessed Mary and Peter and all the
saints
to feast at your table in heaven.
Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Looking for the coming of the kingdom, let us pray with
confidence as our Saviour has taught us.

**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 for ever.

Amen.

The priest breaks the consecrated bread saying:

Lord, we died with you on the cross.

Now we are raised to new life.

We were buried in your tomb.

Now we share in your resurrection.

Live in us, that we may live in you.

We say the Agnus Dei

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

I heard the voice of a great multitude crying, Alleluia.
The Lord our God has entered into his kingdom.

**Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the
Lamb. Alleluia.**

We invite you to join in at home with this prayer:

**Lord Jesus Christ, since I cannot at this time receive
communion, I pray you to come into my heart. I unite
myself with you and embrace you with all my heart,
my soul, and my mind. Let nothing separate me from
you; let me serve you in this life until, by your grace, I
come to your glorious kingdom and unending peace.
Amen.**

Post Communion Prayer

God our Father, you have raised our humanity in Christ
and have fed us with the bread of heaven: mercifully
grant that, nourished with such spiritual blessings, we
may set our hearts in the heavenly places; through
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**We thank you, Lord,
that you have fed us in this sacrament,
united us with Christ,
and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet
prepared for all peoples. Amen.**

As we wait in silence

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 renewing,

make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we long for your empowering,

make us ready for your coming Spirit.

The Blessing

May the Spirit, who set the Church on fire upon the day
of Pentecost, bring the world alive with the love of the
risen Christ. And the blessing of God almighty, the
Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and
remain with you always. **Amen.**

Waiting expectantly for the promised Holy Spirit,

go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia

Thanks be to God. Alleluia, Alleluia.

Thy Kingdom Come 2020

Thy Kingdom Come - the global prayer movement inviting Christians around the world to pray for nine days until Pentecost starts on Ascension Day.

In last Saturday's e-news we read that the aims are: *to join in prayer with the whole family of God the Father; to pray for the empowering of God the Holy Spirit; and that we may be effective witnesses to God the Son, Jesus Christ.*"

Viv reminded us that we all pray in different ways, but the Lord's own prayer is the single that unites us. There is a fantastic range of resources for children, young people, adults and families, schools, churches and small groups on the dedicated website (<https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>). Here we'd like to offer some ideas.

From Shei: Stilling, Prayer, Visualisation

A gentle offering for those readers who would like to engage in an ancient prayer practice. You may find being 'actively' still helpful in these troubling times.

Stilling

Find somewhere comfortable to sit, ideally with your feet flat on the floor and uncrossed legs. Rest your relaxed hands on your thighs with palms facing upwards. Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Be aware of when you breathe in and when you breathe out.

Prayer

When you become aware of the rhythm of your breath add the Jesus Prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ Son of God (on the in breath)

Have mercy on me a sinner (on the out breath)

Repeat for as long as feels comfortable.

Visualisation

You might then like to keep the rhythm of breathing the prayer and add in visualisation of yourself walking in a beautiful place or watching the waves break upon the shore...all in your mind's eye!

Viv suggests a daily reflection on lines from the Lord's Prayer

Day 1 Our Father, who art in heaven,
*How do we think of God? As father, or mother, brother, lover ...not as a 'person'...?
Where do we imagine God to be?*

Day 2 hallowed be thy name;
How do we make God's name 'holy'?

Day 3 thy kingdom come;
Jesus told many parables about God's kingdom. What do we feel his kingdom might be like?

Day 4 thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
As we look around us we are troubled by how many things happen that are not God's will. Can we imagine how this might change?

Day 5 Give us this day our daily bread.
Amid all our present fears and worries, what are the things we give thanks for as gifts and blessings from God?

Day 6 And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.
Can we trust that God will forgive us all the things we regret? And can we forgive others who we feel have wronged us?

Day 7 And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
What are the things that distract us most from focussing on God? What are the things we fear most and want God to save us from?

Day 8 For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
What are the signs of God's kingdom around us today? What are the signs of his power, of his glory?

Day 9 for ever and ever.
Eternity is very difficult for us to imagine....

John Wesley wrote - words recorded in *How to Pray: the Best of John Wesley on Prayer*

"[The Lord's Prayer] lays a general foundation for prayer. It comprises what we must first know of God before we can pray in confidence of being heard. It likewise points out to us the faith, humility, love of God and people with which we are to approach God in prayer."

"Our Father"

*Who art good and gracious to all, our Creator, our preserver;
The Father of our Lord [Jesus] and of us in Him,
Your children by adoption and grace.
Not my Father only, but the Father of the universe, of angels and human beings.*

"Who art in heaven"

*Filling heaven and earth and beholding all things in heaven and earth;
Knowing every creature and all their works,
And every possible event from everlasting to everlasting.
The Almighty Lord and ruler of all, superintending and disposing [giving inclination to] all things.*

"Hallowed be Thy name"

*May You, O Father, be truly known by all intelligent beings
And with affections suitable to that knowledge!
May You be duly honoured, loved, feared, by all in heaven and in earth, by all angels and all people!*

"Thy kingdom come"

*May Your kingdom come quickly and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth!
May all people revere You, O Christ, for their King and truly believe in Your name.
May they be filled with righteousness, peace, joy, holiness, and happiness
Till they are removed into Your kingdom of glory to reign with You forever.*

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven"

*May all inhabitants of the earth do Your will as willingly as the holy angels!
May these do it continually... without any interruption of their willing service...
O Spirit of grace... make them perfect in every good work to do Your will,
And work in them all that is well pleasing in Your sight!*

"Give us today our daily bread"

*O Father, for we claim nothing of right; only of Your free mercy;
For we take no [worry] for tomorrow.
[We trust you for] all things needful for our souls and bodies,
Not only the meat that perishes, but the sacramental bread,
And Your grace, the food which endures to everlasting life.*

"And forgive us our sins, as we also forgive those who sin against us"

*Give us, O Lord, redemption in Your blood, the forgiveness of sins.
As you enable us freely and fully to forgive, so forgive us all our trespasses.*

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"

*Whenever we are tempted, O Lord who helps our infirmities,
Do not allow us to be overcome or suffer loss by it,
But make a way for us to escape so that we may be more than conquerors,
Through Your love, over all sin and the consequences of it.*

"For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory"

*[Yours is] the sovereign right of all things that are or ever were created.
[Yours is] the executive power, whereby You govern all things in Your everlasting kingdom.
[Yours is] the praise due from every creature... for all your wondrous works...
Which endure through all ages, even forever. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer for Creation

"Our Father who art in heaven..."

You are also at home in the air, the soil, the forests and the oceans,

"Hallowed be your name..."

By the care we take of your creation,

"Your kingdom come..."

All that you see is good,

“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...”
Your will to till and care,

“Give us this day our daily bread...”
That all may have sufficient to live life in fullness,

“Forgive us our trespasses...”
Our greed, our exploitation, our lack of concern for other species and for future generations,

“As we forgive those who trespass against us...”
By reconciliation with justice and peace,

“Lead us not into temptation...”
The temptation to equate dominion with exploitation,

“And deliver us from evil...”
The evil of destroying your gift of creation,

“For yours is the kingdom...”
Your Lord, not ours,

“The power and the glory...”
In the cross and the resurrection,

“For ever and ever...”
You were the beginning and you are the end.
Amen and so it be



Church at Home: watch online or dial in

The Diocesan Ascension Day service will be available at 8:15pm on Thursday 21 May. Those unable to watch online may call 01865 920930 to participate by telephone.