

Welcome and Call to Worship

Welcome to this service or worship. We gather to share this time, these thoughts, God's word, our prayers as your followers have done through the ages, through time and eternity, held in your love and knowing that although we are apart we are one, although we are in different spaces we are joined in our faith, although we are confined we are free to worship together because you are beside us, surrounding us, drawing us close and in your love we are all held. As we celebrate again your Ascension we lift our hearts in praise and wonder as we sing.

Hymn Alleluia! Sing to Jesus

Opening Prayer

O God our maker, who is with us when the journey of life begins and knows us as we learn to know ourselves, today we thank you for making yourself known to us through Jesus Christ.

Through all the ups and downs of life you have promised to be with us and walk alongside us. So we turn to you again in this time of worship and offer you both our thanks and our profound gratitude for your loving presence with us here, and in every moment we look for you. You celebrate our triumphs and hold us in our despair and challenge us in our prejudices and failures. So you help us to grow in character and spirit.

We thank you now for Jesus example of life and death and resurrection. For all we learn about sharing life with others, for all we learn about caring and reaching out to others, for all we learn about love for self and others through Jesus.

And for the knowledge that you bring new life and hope in even the most challenging places.

As we turn to you this morning, show us more about how to travel together, about your hope and peace, your faithfulness and your understanding of eternity. Draw near to us, and fill us with your spirit anew. And today, teach us new things that we've never thought about you, just as you taught your disciples new words and attitudes when you walked the road with them. Jesus, teach us to live for your praise and glory.

Saviour, Redeemer, Friend, Teacher, our all in all. Amen

Song All heaven declares

We share in these responsive words:

Today and tomorrow

In time and eternity

Your Kingdom come

In our world, in our streets,

In our homes and communities,

Your Kingdom come

In our lives, in our loves,

In our hopes and our travelling

Your Kingdom come

Song King of kings, majesty

Lord's Prayer:

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

Song There is none like you led by Mike Garnier

Knowing Jesus in a new way – Known in Waiting

On this Sunday in the season of Easter we remember how the disciples returned to Jerusalem. They gathered again in their room and Jesus was there.

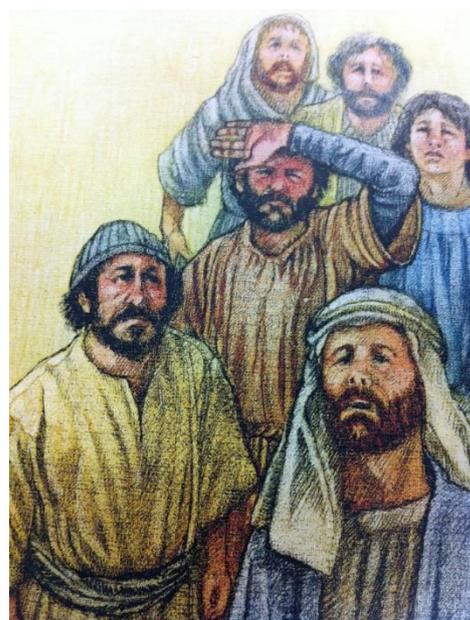
They were more comfortable now with the new way of knowing Him, so they asked many questions, most of them were foolish.

"Lord, will you restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus cut short such talk. "It is not for you to know the times or seasons."

He led them out of the room and through the streets. They went beyond the walls of Jerusalem to a hillside, perhaps near Bethany.

Jesus stopped and they gathered around him. He lifted up his hands, looking at each one, and blessed them. He then "withdrew" and "a cloud took him out of their sight."



The disciples stood looking into the sky until someone said, "Why are you looking into the sky?" There were two men standing, dressed in white. The disciples felt silly. What were they doing looking up into the sky for what they could no longer see? The strangers then answered their own question. "This was Jesus. He is gone now, as you have known him." It seemed like a great weight was lifted from their shoulders.

The disciples turned and walked back to Jerusalem. Now they had to wait. What was this Holy Spirit he said was coming? How would they know when it arrived? They waited and waited.

While they waited they found someone to replace Judas. God helped them choose Matthias, so now they were The Twelve, once more, but they still had to keep waiting. How long would it take for the Holy Spirit to come?

I wonder where you see something of yourself in this story?

I wonder what questions, however foolish, you would have wanted to ask Jesus?

I wonder what you are waiting for today?

Offering

Jesus offers us the story of the widow who brings a small coin to the temple courts as her offering of love and invites us to give generously what we can to God's work. Together we offer gifts of love as well as money as an expression of our thankfulness for all that we have received through grace. We pause for a moment to invite God to again make our gifts enough to bring transformation in our community and in people's lives.

The Grace is said: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, Amen.*

Reading Ecclesiastes 3: 1-15 read by Ali Lloyd

Reflection The day thou gavest Lord is ended

Address Known in Waiting

What a time it is! It's an extraordinary time in our lives! Just as it was for those first followers of Jesus trying to understand a world where resurrection happens. As I've thought about this moment when they move from the fleeting presence of Jesus resurrection appearances to this moment of departure it seems to chime with the ending of a day. The day? Of incarnation, of the time when God showed his face and walked again with his friends until the calamitous cross. Echoes of Eden and another changed world from which we could argue we are still reeling turned into this moment when instead of humanity being sent out of the garden, it is God who is sent out of the world.

The Ascension is one of those difficult moments when you really had to be there. You had to be there to really understand it. It's a bit like the Transfiguration account, out of this world, hard to grasp or imagine what it must've been like to witness. Very much an experience that's hard to explain. You get the feeling that after Jesus had finally gone, they would all have wondered off silently, lost in their own thoughts and feelings, not really wanting to talk, or discuss. Perhaps a couple went one way, one another, perhaps a little group just sat down staring literally into space. I'd liken it to when I've seen a really moving film. I remember going to see *Cry Freedom*, a film about Steve Biko, a black activist, and South Africa before it was freed from apartheid. When the film finished and the credits rolled, nobody moved, there was complete silence, nothing to be said, each simply lost within their own thoughts as the injustice and anger and horror and sadness rumbled inside like a storm waiting to happen.

Hard to understand and put across the way we're changed by these moments. The words don't come easily, but it matters to us. Those disciples, well, how were you to explain this one. After all the time convincing people that Jesus was risen, now Jesus goes and disappears into the clouds, leaving behind a few well chosen words about what they were supposed to do from then on. What a mixture of puzzlement and disappointment, excitement and confusion. Within them their hearts were changed, and yet they also knew that they had to wait. It was the end of a day, but another would begin in the morning.

So what's it all about? How do we make sense of this moment when Jesus disappears behind the clouds, and the angels appear to give the message that he'll return in the same way. It's a strange and awesome moment. But gives rise to some strange flights of fancy. Did he wave as went? Were his robes flapping round his legs as he rose up? We women know the trouble with long skirts and a windy day! Did he rise slowly, or float away, getting smaller and smaller? Was he smiling? Did it hurt? When did he ping out of earthly contact? Oh and I could go on with any number of simply fascinating questions that one day I'd like answers to, except that I think I'll have forgotten them when the time comes.

Well, the meaning for us is in the preparation Jesus takes and the way that this event prepares the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Another kind of presence is required that followers of Jesus will find is an indispensable gift that brings the life of God within touching distance, nay even entering into our lives, being part of us, in a way that the earthly Jesus could not.

But I don't want to say too much about that, 'cos we're not there yet, and what will Mike talk about next week if I go jumping on ahead of ourselves.

Jesus was saying a final goodbye to his disciples. Those final moments with the last few looks of love, memorizing faces; the last few squeezes of the hand on the shoulder, the embraces and those last words. Oh the last words seem so significant, mustn't be wasted. For this moment you save the important things. The conversation is stripped to the bare essentials, what is most urgent, what to leave as your last word and testament? I love you. Take good care of yourself. I'll miss you. I'll be thinking of you?

I will be with you always, even to the end of the world.

The way the disciples knew Jesus changed right here. It's one thing to talk about a person, to relate to their comings and goings, the people they met, the things they did, the stories they told. But once Jesus has ascended to heaven it really is living by faith. We don't share, can't share, in the experience of being in another time and space, another dimension. We don't know what it's like to sit at the right hand of the Father, to be actually in the throne room, to see him face to face, as so many of the visions of heaven suggest to us. That's something we still await. So, you see, we're dealing with something different now, less definable, a Jesus that's not where we are. This is Christmas in reverse day.

There's so much we don't yet know about the future. And to tell the truth, it's a little scary at times! This is, after all, all we know! This life, these relationships, this culture, our history. Humanity and the physical world, well, we may not understand it all, most of the time, any of the time, but it's real to us. It's home, it's alive, and happening to us. It's all we know!

Look around you. And when you go for your walk, open your eyes, notice what's about you, see the solidness and familiarity of the world that you take for granted. Appreciate and even wonder at the security it gives you, and acknowledge the way you move in it, the way you instinctively know the way things work, and the order and systems of life. Even think about the tiny particles of matter that only together make up, incredibly, our community, our homes, our gardens, our physical being, life itself. Awesome, Amazing.

So that Jesus should disappear into the heavens seems to remove him from us in more ways than just sight. Well, that's one way of looking at it, anyway!

However, ascension in a strange way opens a door for us to see the future, yet a future that has begun here in our time. You see, here is a moment when heaven touches earth. Here for a second two worlds collide. The new and the old, the future and the present. All that we hope for and work towards, and look expectantly at, is wrapped up here as Jesus goes before to prepare the way. His preparations for his leaving complete. He's given his final words of instruction. There at the last he's impressed upon them their task, and made sure they know they're not alone in it. And in other places he's told them that he's going ahead to prepare places for them, and countless others who will follow on.

It's here that we can pause a while to lift our eyes towards the heavens and expect that Jesus will return bringing finally his reign of peace and justice. It's a vision!

But both Matthew and Luke ask us to keep our feet well and truly on the ground. Matthew's vision that Mike explored last week in knowing Jesus in making him known, reminds them that Jesus has authority here on earth and in heaven and then express instructions were given as to what the task for them next was. These words have become key for every believer in Jesus since, Go and make disciples. And when Luke describes the two figures in white saying to the disciples, "Why are you looking up into the heavens?" The implication is that they should now be looking in the direction where the message of Jesus would lead them.

One theologian asks this, 'What might have happened if, instead of looking upwards, the disciples had looked downward and seen Jesus's footprints in the dust of the earth. Here is what should be the focus of their attention: the footprints which remind them of everything he said because it was all real, it did all happen, and death could not contain him; and perhaps the powerful symbolism of the footprints as the path which the disciples now need to step into and follow.

Brothers and Sisters, we have to believe that God can make a difference in issues of justice and politics and poverty and peace, but also in our lives and in the lives of those we love. It's like we're being asked to keep an eye on the bigger picture, but it starts with you and I because the bigger picture changes when you and I choose to follow God's way of justice and peace in our lives. By caring about what we buy, by supporting those who work for change, by getting to know our neighbors and giving time to our communities. By seeking a better environment to live in, by providing help to those in need or in trouble. These are the places where heaven touches earth, that's God's Eden. It's where we walk with God most closely and where a new day begins.

This could be our time to think how - as William Temple suggested - we might liberate Christ into his constant presence in our world. It could be our time to think how that great commission given to every disciple takes its hold in our lives and really becomes part of our everyday thoughts and feelings, opening us up to love of our neighbour, to make us the missionary people that's our reason for being here. And perhaps we also need to question whether our own faith journey is sometimes marked by looking upwards to the heavens - waiting for something to happen, confused by change, looking for a perfect world and perhaps yearning for how things used to be, - or whether our journey calls us to look across the face of the earth as we seek Jesus's footprints, measure our own steps against them, embrace transformation and empowerment, and decide where those footprints might be leading us. The challenge of Acts 1 is not a call to look upwards: it is a call to trust that Christ's promise is down - and in - and around - and among us.

As soon as we start looking around us, the first thing we see is each other. We're in relationship, and it's in the working out of relationships that our faith should be most evident. We're not individuals alone, but gathered together in the name of Christ, and more widely we're part of a whole family with a sense of purpose that is God given. Our purpose is to make Christ known through our lives - to create touching places. So be it Lord, your kingdom stands and grows forever till all your creatures own thy sway!

Song A touching Place

Prayers of Intercession

We remember before you, those you call us to serve.

The broken, the grieving, the victims of crime, the lonely, the addicted, and those you have placed on our hearts specifically today...

We remember before you, those we are called to love: our families, our neighbours, the poor, the stranger, the prisoner, the homeless, and those whom God brings to our minds today...

We remember before you, those you call us to walk alongside: those who are grieving, those who are scared, those who are waiting, those who feel hopeless, those who are celebrating, those who need to know they are not alone, those who are working tirelessly in schools and hospitals, care homes and shops, those who are unsure of their future because exams are postponed, graduations delayed, jobs unavailable...

We remember before you those you call us to challenge, who hold power over others' lives and have responsibility for our communities common purse, whose decisions from afar affect the poorest and most vulnerable and can be life affirming or life destroying. We pray for compassion and wisdom and words with meaning.

May your kingdom come through our prayers and actions this week, as we wait for a vaccine, for safe space once more, for freedom to meet. Help us to follow you in our words and actions. In the name of Jesus Amen.

Hymn By Faith we see the hand of God

Blessing

The Blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and remain with you always. Amen