



## Seventh Sunday of Easter: Ascension

**Morning Prayer prepared by the  
St Thomas à Becket service team**

Dispersed community prayer at 10:30am

Welcome to St Thomas à Becket's Sunday worship, brought to you by our lay team, as we do regularly on the fourth Sunday of the month. Today we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension. The first reading will tell that story.

If you can, ask Mr Google to show you some paintings of the Ascension. If we were in Italy, plenty of churches would have one to show you, often in a dedicated side-chapel. It was a popular and spectacular theme that patrons were happy to pay for. We have to make do with an image on screen, just for now.

As we come to share the words of Morning Prayer, you might like to light a candle or two.

This Sunday, from the team, readings by Jane Mathews, a talk by David Mathews and intercessions by Jan Stokes. From us all, best wishes and prayers to you, for your neighbours and for those you love.

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*In the pages that follow, ♦ denotes an optional pause to keep silence and meditate on the words*



*Where you see this symbol, an audio version is available on the church website:  
[www.widcombe.church/church-online/](http://www.widcombe.church/church-online/)*

### ***Preparation***

At this feast of Ascension, we are one in worship, though conscious of being parted from friends and relatives. May Christ, the true, the only light banish all loss and darkness from our hearts and minds. So we begin

O Lord, open our lips  
*and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.*

In your resurrection, O Christ,  
*let heaven and earth rejoice. Alleluia.*

Blessed are you, God of compassion and mercy,  
to you be praise and glory for ever.

In the darkness of our sin,  
your light breaks forth like the dawn  
and your healing springs up for deliverance.

As we rejoice in the gift of your saving help,  
sustain us with your bountiful Spirit  
and open our lips to sing your praise.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Blessed be God for ever.



The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;  
let us pray with one heart and mind.



As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,  
so may the light of your presence, O God,  
set our hearts on fire with love for you;  
now and for ever. **Amen.**

### ***Psalm 68***

Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered;  
let those who hate him flee before him.  
As smoke is driven away, so drive them away;  
as wax melts before the fire,  
let the wicked perish before God.  
But let the righteous be joyful;  
let them exult before God;  
let them be jubilant with joy.

Sing to God, sing praises to his name;  
lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds—  
his name is the Lord—  
be exultant before him.

Father of orphans and protector of widows  
is God in his holy habitation.  
God gives the desolate a home to live in;  
he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,  
but the rebellious live in a parched land.

O God, when you went out before your people,  
when you marched through the wilderness,  
the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain  
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai,  
at the presence of God, the God of Israel.  
Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad;  
you restored your heritage when it languished;  
your flock found a dwelling in it;  
in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth;  
sing praises to the Lord,  
O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens;

listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.  
Ascribe power to God,  
whose majesty is over Israel;  
and whose power is in the skies.  
Awesome is God in his sanctuary,  
the God of Israel;  
he gives power and strength to his people.  
Blessed be God!

**Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen.**



***The Apostles' Creed***

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.





## Hymn 118 At the name of Jesus; played by Jules

At the name of Jesus  
every knee shall bow,  
every tongue confess him  
King of Glory now.  
'Tis the Father's pleasure  
we should call him Lord,  
who from the beginning  
was the mighty Word:

Bore it up triumphant  
with its human light,  
through all ranks of creatures  
to the central height,  
to the throne of Godhead,  
to the Father's breast;  
filled it with the glory  
of that perfect rest.

At his voice creation  
sprang at once to sight,  
all the angel faces  
all the hosts of light,  
thrones and dominations,  
stars upon their way,  
all the heavenly orders  
in their great array.

In your hearts enthrone him;  
there let him subdue  
all that is not holy,  
all that is not true:  
look to Him your Saviour,  
in temptations' hour,  
let his will enfold you,  
in its light and power.

Humbled for a season,  
to receive a name  
from the lips of sinners  
unto whom he came,  
faithfully he bore it  
spotless to the last,  
brought it back victorious  
when from death he passed.

Christians, this Lord Jesus  
shall return again,  
with his Father's glory,  
o'er the earth to reign;  
for all wreaths of empire  
meet upon his brow,  
and our hearts confess him  
King of Glory now



## *The Word of God (read by Jane Mathews)*

### Acts 1:6-14

#### The Ascension of Jesus

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

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

### ***John 17:1-11***

#### ***Jesus Prays for His Disciples***

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, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

'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. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 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. 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. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 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.



#### ***Reflections for the Sunday after Ascension, 24 May 2020***

#### **Ascension – The Wrench of Parting (David Mathews)**

At this stage of the Church's year, our lead story, as you might think of it, comes not from the Gospels, but from Acts. And while the story has Jesus at its centre, I wonder what it was like to be one of the disciples. Why? Because they are like us, of course, and, crucially, because they had not read the next chapter of the story.

The Feast of the Ascension, which we are celebrating, is, to modern minds, a curious event. And – let's not pretend otherwise – we in the Anglican Church pass over it relatively lightly nowadays.

Like our vicar Tim, I was brought up a Baptist. (Unlike him, I'm not trained in this preaching malarkey, so what you're getting now may lack a certain ... bottom?) Anyway, in my school on a Thursday in May we nonconformists had mixed feelings about the lads from All Saints (Church in Wales, boy, not *chapel*) having the morning off to sing in the choir or

serve at the Ascension Day service. Time out of school, yes, but having to endure all those foreign set prayers and ritual?

But I doubt this happens much in 2020, the celebration, such as it is, mostly being moved to a Sunday. How come? Are we embarrassed by the unlikely, fey detail of the event? Or is it our eagerness for Pentecost 10 days later?

Whatever the reason, I say today, let Pentecost wait. Not because I want to dwell on the choreography of Jesus's being lifted up and taken from the disciples' sight. Giotto and goodness what other painters have created far more glorious, if fantastical, scenes than I could manage. Rather, I want us to walk in the disciples' shoes.

I want us to think about departures and the wrench of parting.

In a break from their upper room, the disciples walked with Jesus to Mount Olivet, a couple or so miles away from the old city. They did not seem to know that he was leaving on that particular day, but Jesus had arranged for them to be with him at his departure. He wanted them to see him off.

Last year I had a story published in an anthology called *Departures*. *Midday Bus'*, my story was called. It tells of George saying goodbye to his lodger Laura at a grotty bus stop on the edge of a seaside town.

Seeing people off used to be much more of an event. Now, visitors and guests simply drive away. But once upon a time, departure by public transport was common, and was a more ceremonial affair. If not saluting you at a bus stop, your hosts might have bought platform tickets at the railway station, helped you find a seat on the train, loaded your bags onto the luggage rack, checked you had your thermos flask, and treated you to a slice of British Rail fruitcake before scrambling off the train when the guard blew his whistle. Airports the same. I remember particularly a trip to Rhoose to wave as my sister walked across the tarmac to the Cambrian Airways DC3 for her first flight to France. Not quite the farewell scene in Casablanca, but you get the picture.

Other departures are unhappier.

Even arrival can be bitter-sweet. Granny arrives for her first visit without Grandpa. An old friend visits, much changed. But, by and large, it's departures that are the more poignant.

Someone dear leaves for the other side of the world. Will you ever see each other again?

You sit at the bedside of someone who is dying. To be able to say goodbye may be a privilege, but the parting can be bitter hard.

And to say goodbye by mobile phone, as people have had to do recently, and as some did during the twin towers attack in New York, oh, how do you cope with that?

So to Mount Olivet and Jesus's departure. For the disciples, unlike us, this moment is not in a hiatus between Easter and Pentecost.

Ask a vicar, 'When's Ascension Day?' and 'Second Thursday before Pentecost,' might come the answer.

Oh I grant you, as Mary set out for us last week, that Jesus had explained to the disciples that he was sending the Spirit, but on previous performance would they would have appreciated what he meant? How could they, in advance, understand something so remote from their experience?

No, this time would not have felt like an interlude with a known, exciting ending. The disciples had been glad of Jesus's presence with them, heartened by it, once they got over the shock of the events at Passover and after. They lived in the moment. I'll say again, they did not have the bigger picture that we have.

Off they go then, on what must have seemed a routine outing to take the air and walk and talk, and POW! Jesus leaves them. A few words from him about what awaits them, and he's gone. They're left gawping at the air, while a couple of chaps in white mildly tick them off for not cottoning on to what's just happened.

To lose Jesus once, albeit that he returned to them, was bad enough, but a second time?

What's that you say? It was a wondrously spiritual event? How marvellous to have been there? Who are you kidding? Writing the story decades later, when he hadn't been there, Luke can be quite calm about it. But at the time? That gawping seems pretty authentic to me.

And then imagine the walk back to the city.

'What do we say to the others?'

'They'll never believe us.'

'Who were those blokes?'

'Why didn't you stop him?'

'Why didn't you?'

'I don't want to talk about it.'

'Let's just get back.'

'I don't understand.'

'What do we do now? Peter, what do we do now?'

'Let me think.'

We have the advantage of knowing what's coming next. The disciples had only the vaguest notion, just words really, and they would have been lost in the turmoil of emotions. And

you can imagine that, on the succeeding days, their thoughts and conversations would have remained largely about Jesus's departure, the parting, their loss, the hole in their lives.

Fortunately, they stuck by each other. Were they still afraid of the authorities? Of the crowds? How comfortable or anxious were they in their self-imposed confinement?

Ah yes, confinement. Self-isolation. Had to be mentioned. But ..... have you and I, in modern times, ever been in a better position to empathise with Peter, James and John, Thomas, Bartholomew, the Marys and the rest, waiting, waiting?

Are we getting bread today? Whose turn is it to go for water? The cheese curds? How long will the chickpeas last? And the beans? Will the wine keep for tomorrow? Oh, what would I give for a fig? Mind how you go out there. Keep away from the crowds, especially that unruly lot down the street. Keep away from the synagogue.

And the deeper conversations, and the sulks, the private worries, the prayers, the debates, the niggles, the despair? Oh, Jesus, why did you have to go?

For the little band huddled in the upper room, this was no low-key feast in the church's cycle, not a morning off school, not a 'see you next month' ta ta. The Ascension of Jesus, for all the promises and the hope, would have left these men and women bereft. While we look comfortably to Pentecost, these folk, people like us, looked into a void.

In my *Departures* story, my characters George and Laura had 'said their goodbyes as they walked the mile to the bus stop. Each knew the conversation would be the last between them. She might send him a postcard, to say that she had arrived somewhere, but no letter, nor would she ring.'

Our story, the disciples' story, has a different outcome, but set it aside. This week, set it aside. Simply walk with the Marys, Peter, Thomas and company in those hollow days.

If you have been, thank you for listening or reading.

**Amen**



### **Prayers of intercession (offered by Jan Stokes)**

As we celebrate this Ascension Sunday together, let us pray

God of love, as we give thanks for the festival of Jesus' entry into heaven, we pray for the unity of the church and a renewal of vision in these exceptional times.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer**

Help us to embrace the power of prayer in our own homes as we give thanks for the many acts of neighbourly kindness we are witnessing in our newly strengthened communities.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for families and friends divided by the coronavirus. We think of the many families untimely bereaved and particularly those struggling to come to terms with their inability to be with loved ones in their final hours, unable to give or receive comfort or to say their 'goodbyes'.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for those in mental distress brought on by isolation and lack of hope. Help us all to see the promise of a brighter future ahead and a rethinking of our values and aspirations as we work towards the so-called 'new normal'. We thank you for the blessing and comfort of modern communications enabling many people to keep in touch with friends and family, thus going some way to alleviating their loneliness and anxieties.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for all those who have had their education so badly disrupted. We ask our Government to address the problem of those socially and economically disadvantaged and the effect this will have had in widening the gap in academic achievement. We pray for all teachers in the stressful times ahead as they have to cope with the extra problem of maintaining social distancing in schools.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer**

Let us remember and thank all our dedicated NHS workers and those who work in social care, in homes and in the community. Protect them from the effects of coronavirus and give them the strength and energy to continue to battle through in these most challenging of conditions.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for our Queen and our Government and the wider world as we all struggle with these unprecedented problems. We pray for those working in research and hope their experience, dedication and knowledge will prevail in combatting Covid19.

Lord, in your mercy,

**Hear our prayer**

We pray for all those in economic distress, those who have lost their livelihoods, their jobs, their businesses and give them hope in our ability and determination to rebuild the economy in this our very strong country.

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ,  
Amen**



***The Collect for the seventh Sunday of Easter***

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**

**Gathering our prayers and praises into one, as our Saviour has taught us, so we pray**

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.**

***To Conclude***

May the risen Christ grant us the joys of eternal life.

**Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.**

**Amen**

