

twelvebaskets



ASCENSION SUNDAY A

A complete Sunday service ready to use
for worship and inspire ideas in your church

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Ascension Sunday - Year A
21st May 2023



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

21 STF – Born in song! OR

608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord, who joins us by his grace

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

297 STF – Christ is alive! Let Christians sing OR

318 STF – Christ, our King before creation

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 93; Luke 24:44-53

Hymn:

300 STF – Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia! OR

293 STF – All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

348 STF – He is Lord, he is Lord OR

424 STF – God forgave my sin in Jesus' name

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

364 STF – O for a thousand tongues to sing OR

669 STF – The Saviour, when to heaven he rose, in splendid triumph o'er his foes

Blessing

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Call to worship

Your love has lifted me, and lifted each one of us,
Help us to know something of that love today,
In our worship, our thanksgiving, and our praise.

Help us to love you, as you first loved us,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

21 STF – Born in song! OR

608 STF – All praise to our redeeming Lord, who joins us by his grace

Opening Prayers

Gracious Lord,
open our ears to hear your voice,
open our minds to understand your word,
open our eyes to see your glory,
open our hearts so we can respond to your love.

We thank you Lord, that we are resurrection people,
we can live in the full knowledge that death has lost its sting,
our saviour has overcome it.

We give you thanks and praise,
that when we are lost,
you always find us.

When we grieve,
you are our comfort.

When we celebrate,
you join in the chorus of cheers.

We cry out with thanksgiving and joy,
we sing your praises and hope to dwell in the house of the lord forever.

Forgive us, Lord Jesus,
when we haven't loved our neighbours as ourselves,
when we haven't forgiven how we have been forgiven,
when we judged others without mercy,
when we have spoken without kindness.

We are truly sorry for the times we fell short.

Help us to follow your example,
to seek your kingdom here on earth and to bring peace and light to those we meet.

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

We gather here today to renew our trust in you,
to support one another in holy fellowship,
and to bring the first fruits of our lives to you.

Draw near to us, we pray.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Today is one of those important Sundays in the life of the church. In fact, you could even say it's the part one of the finale of the season that is Easter!

Like any good part one of a finale, let us recap what has happened so far (during the retelling, add to each part what you did within your own community as a way of grounding the narrative):

- We started with Lent, which starts just after Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day, a time where Jesus wandered around for 40 days and 40 nights, resisting temptation from the enemy. We remember this by giving up chocolate, sweets, Facebook or something else for those 40 days.
- Next, we have Palm Sunday! A time where Jesus entered Jerusalem, riding a donkey, to crowds of people waving palms and praising his name! We all received palm crosses that day to remind ourselves of that day.
- Jesus then performs a few small miracles and questions some church leaders who challenge his authority. That small miracle is sometimes known as "The Cursing of the Fig Tree."
- We are then brought to Maundy Thursday. A time when Jesus gathered the disciples together for the Last Supper. The night in which he was betrayed. A night we also remember a lot in church as it forms the basis of what Communion is.
- Good Friday is the day when Jesus died on the cross. It's a sad day, but we know what came after....
- Easter Sunday! Jesus is resurrected! The women in the garden went and told the disciples that he was alive, the stone was rolled away, the tomb was empty!

Phew! We're all caught up! Between Easter Sunday and now, Jesus has slowly been presenting himself to select people to prove he is alive. Remember the story of Thomas, or Doubting Thomas? That's one of the times Jesus proved he was alive. In all these times, Jesus talked with and shared ideas with his friends as to what the Kingdom of God would be like. But in all these conversations Jesus stressed to his disciples that they shouldn't leave Jerusalem. I like to think that Jesus is like a friend who's trying to get you to stay because they know there is a surprise for you, but don't want to ruin the surprise!

² Opening prayers written by Sheila Matthews

Yet... Jesus does spoil the surprise, but the disciples are too focused on what else Jesus says:

Read Acts 1: 4-11, ideally in a translation like the Good News that is easy for children and young people in the congregation to follow.

Jesus ascended to Heaven, hence why we call this Sunday "Ascension Sunday" and in the process teased the disciples and us with what is coming next in the second part of the Easter Season Finale: The Holy Spirit.

Let us pray:

Lord God, help us to be patient and alert to the coming of the Holy Spirit, and thank you for the inspiration that is Jesus in our lives.

Amen.³

Hymn:

297 STF – Christ is alive! Let Christians sing OR

318 STF – Christ, our King before creation

Readings: Psalm 93; Luke 24:44-53

Hymn:

300 STF – Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia! OR

293 STF – All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord

Reflections on the readings

Today's reflection comes to us from Graeme Dutton, a Methodist minister in Bradford. He says:

When it comes to films, I love a good historical epic. I can remember lazy Sunday afternoons spent watching the likes of Ben Hur, El Cid and The Vikings with my dad. We've seen them that many times that it's become a running joke in our family. 'Hey, Mom, there's a film on ITV4 called El Cid, I think Dad might like it!'

I love the newer 'classics' too. That first scene in Gladiator when Maximus gives his speech before battle is incredible, 'what we do in life, echoes in eternity.' What a brilliant motivation! Talking of motivation the speech by William Wallace to his troops before the battle of Stirling in 'Braveheart' is even better.

It follows a great bit of comedy interplay when the soldiers who have gathered don't believe that Wallace is who he says he is because, amongst other things, 'he's no tall enough.' William's response that if he were really William Wallace he'd 'consume the English with fire balls from his eyes and bolts of lightening from..', well, from somewhere else, leads to much laughter. He does then assure the gathered troops he is who he says he is and inspires them with those immortal words 'dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willin' to trade ALL the days, from this day to that,

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

for one chance, just one chance, to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they'll never take... OUR FREEDOM!

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus, is also in top motivational form. He begins by ensuring that his disciples know exactly who he is. He reminds them of everything he has told them and everything they have seen and experienced while they have been journeying with him. He then tells them that they are the witnesses who are going to be tasked with taking the message of salvation from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. However, before they begin that work there's another gift for them that will build them up and assist them in their mission. The gift of God's Holy Spirit.

Of course we know that both the mission and the gift are not the sole reserve of those first disciples but are both ours to claim as followers of Christ.

As Jesus blesses his disciples and ascends into heaven, he sets in motion the continuation of his work. The fact that this story is repeated to the early church in the first chapter of Acts, just seeks to emphasise that the baton has been passed on. The Holy Spirit is coming, not just for those first disciples but for everyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus. If we are willing to take part in that work we are not simply left to do so in our strength, but will be gifted the helper in order that we are never alone.

I often make use of the Methodist Worship Book when I'm leading pastoral services such as baptisms and weddings. One of my favourite things about the liturgy in those services, and indeed many of the others included in the book, is that whenever anyone is asked to make a promise, the response they give is always 'with God's help I/We will.' There is a recognition built into the way that we respond that we can make no real promise to God without his help.

That knowledge of God's help to us, through the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus at the moment of his ascension to heaven can be a source of great confidence to us. As we seek to be faithful people, living out a life of hope, we can cling to that promise in the face of challenge and opposition. In a world that can sometimes seem hostile to the message of the church it helps us to remember that while we have a mission to be part of, it is God who is always in control. We join him in making known his Spirit in the world.

Questions for reflection on your own for a minute or two, and then to discuss in groups of three. *[Let people know when their minute of reflection time is up, and you may have to facilitate the time in groups a little to ensure people are not excluded. If possible, display the questions on the screen, or pause people after 5-8 minutes of conversation and remind them of the questions. Overall, allow 10-15 minutes for conversation in groups, then bring people back together to sing].*

- What's the best piece of motivational advice I've ever heard?
- How did it feel when you first heard it?
- What's the best motivational advice you think you can give to someone else?
- Where have you seen God's Spirit at work in your life this week? This month? This year?
- What new thing might you try and do 'with God's help' in the coming weeks?⁴

Hymn:

348 STF – He is Lord, he is Lord OR

424 STF – God forgave my sin in Jesus' name

⁴ Reflection written by Graeme Dutton

Prayers of intercession

*The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty;
the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength;
indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.*

Heavenly Father, we thank you that your glory and strength permeate all your created order.

We offer our prayer for all those places and situations where we feel less sure of your security.

Where human greed has led to inequality in wealth and health.

For all who feel vulnerable.

For all who have suffered or are suffering abuse.

For all known to us this day who are suffering in body, mind or spirit.

For all who feel they have no voice.

*Your throne was established long ago;
you are from all eternity.*

Help us, Lord, to see and to claim the eternity that you promise for all of us.

*The seas have lifted up, Lord,
the seas have lifted up their voice;
the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.*

May we join creation in its worship of you.

Teach us how to live in harmony with your natural world.

To reverse the damage caused by climate change.

To share the God given resources of this planet we call home

*Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea—
the Lord on high is mighty.*

Mighty Lord, we thank you that even though you reign on the highest height, you chose to make a dwelling place within us.

Help us to feel your Holy Spirit at work in our lives.

May we always recognise and be led by your will in our lives.

*Your statutes, Lord, stand firm;
holiness adorns your house
for endless days.*

May your holiness reign in our churches, our homes and our hearts,
Now and forever,

Amen.⁵

We will now take up the offering.

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Graeme Dutton

Gracious God, who gives gifts so generously, who has blessed us so richly, accept these gifts here today, that they might be used to the transformation of this world, for the discovery of the love, hope, grace and peace that flows from you, out into the world.

Amen.⁶

Hymn:

364 STF – O for a thousand tongues to sing OR

669 STF – The Saviour, when to heaven he rose, in splendid triumph o'er his foes

Blessing

We go from this place, hearing words of encouragement from the Creator,
We go from this place, inspired to follow in the ways of the Christ,
We go from this place, transformed by the power of the Spirit,
Travel with us, triune God, that we may come to know you more each day.

Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker