

Happy Ascension Day everyone

I'm looking forward to seeing some of you later on this morning at the Zoom coffee and catch up. Congratulations to those who are trying out some of the new ways of staying in touch with one another during lockdown - don't worry if this is your first go at zoom meeting - we shall be learning together, with the help I am sure of those in our number for whom it has become very familiar. Ascension Day is a very good day to be reminded that we can be with others even when physically separated! I've put the link to the meeting below. Lovely to see you if you can make it.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/3198911457?pwd=UUpCV3dDbG5TTTHJ5R3dnL09mMk5RZz09>

Meeting ID: 319 891 1457

Password: Kings1

(Ed. – sorry this is posted too late for this morning's meeting, but there will be another next Tuesday at 11am and the link will be emailed out later.)

But of course our old ways of communicating are also valuable. I'm hoping the package of prayer booklets will have reached you; if not, I'm also attaching the booklet for Ascension Day, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday to this email. I'm, also including the words to a simple act of worship for Ascension Day and a reflection by Revd Carole; these will also appear during the day on youtube and the facebook page. The link to the video is below, but don't be alarmed if nothing happens when you click on it now: at the moment the video is still uploading onto youtube which is quite a slow process, so it may not appear online much before midday.

https://youtu.be/BM_1BQ7YmSc

Also on the facebook page are the services of compline, which Revd Carole has been leading on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. It makes for a very gentle and lovely close to the day, so do give that a try if you've not already.

As ever, it's always good to hear your news, and I hope you are enjoying the spell of fine weather.

Love and prayers

John

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An Act of Worship for Ascension Day

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

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.

The Ascension Reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

While staying with them, Jesus 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, for John baptized with water; but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' 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 and periods that the Father has set by 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.'

Seeing we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us offer him the praise worthy of his name:

Glory to God in the highest,

**and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

Risen Christ,
you have raised our human nature to the throne of heaven:
help us to seek and serve you,
that we may join you at the Father's side,
where you reign with the Spirit in glory,
now and for ever.

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke (24.44-end)

Then Jesus said to them, '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.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 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, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 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.'

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

A Reflection from Revd Carole

Prayers of intercession

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Then the disciples 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. They were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers

God the Father,
who has given to his Son then name above every name,
strengthen you to proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord.

God the Son,
who is our great high priest passed into the heavens,
plead for you at the right hand of the Father.

God the Holy Spirit,
who pours out his abundant gifts upon the Church,
make you faithful servants of Christ our King.

And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

A Reflection for Ascension Day from Revd Carole

The Ascension of our dear Lord Jesus Christ – one of the most important festivals in the Christian Year. *We* celebrate it, but I wonder how it felt for the disciples?

I imagine the feelings of woe, despite the gospel account saying they returned to Jerusalem with joy! For them, this was a second bereavement, grief at the loss of the same person twice within just a few weeks! That surely doesn't happen very often in real life! But there was also joy – for Jesus was sending an Advocate from God in his place, though they knew not, nor had any real understanding of, what or whom that power from on high might be. And joy that Jesus had said he would return (see Luke 21.27) – in their minds this would be in a few weeks, months at the most. They had no idea Jesus would apparently not return in their lifetimes.....

In Luke's Gospel, the writer doesn't particularly describe how Jesus was carried up to heaven, but in the Acts of the Apostles which is attributed to the same writer, Luke, the description of the Ascension is much more vivid. *Jesus was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight.* We are to assume that the two men in white robes who appeared were angels, and they said that this Jesus would come back in the same way that they saw him go into heaven. This is the one sentence that always grabs my attention. On a literal level, does this mean

Jesus will really return from behind a cloud? Should we be looking to the sky, at each cloud that is formed there, to see if we can see one that may just be the herald of the second coming?

It may be so, but on further reflection, I think perhaps we could look at it on another level, from a different angle. The cloud could be a metaphor for the veil that continually hides Jesus from our view. That it is not that we are still waiting for him to come for a second time, in the physical sense at least, but that he is here with us now and we just can't quite see him. Something akin to someone telling us a joke, and we just don't quite get it until it is explained to us, and then we see quite clearly the intention in the punch line. Maybe the example of a joke we don't understand is not quite right – maybe St Paul says it better in 1 Corinthians 13. Verse 12 - *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

However, we often fail to understand that we are not seeing things as they really are. We look through rose tinted glasses, assuming we understand all, but we frequently look from our own perspective, not acknowledging there might be another way to see. As with not understanding the joke, we don't ask for it to be explained so that we don't appear to others as being silly, dense perhaps! There is no shame in asking, but we are loathed to ask, and so we laugh along with everyone else, pretending that it all makes perfect sense!

When Ruth and I went to the Holy Land, nearly 5 years ago now, we went to the Chapel of the Ascension (here is a picture of it) –



The exact spot Jesus is believed to have ascended from. Inside is a piece of stone with an indent which is supposedly the footprint of Jesus as he left this earth on His ascension back to be with His Father (here is another picture) –



Some believe it is *the* true footprint, others are more sceptical! Is this a case of seeing dimly? The public cemetery outside Jerusalem is just down the road from the Chapel of the Ascension and a lot of Jewish Christians are buried there – Jewish Christians from all over the world – because they truly believe that Jesus will return to this exact same spot at the second coming and they want to be amongst the first in line to see him again on the Day of Resurrection, and the Final Judgement. The cemetery is now full, so don't go thinking you can reserve a grave space!

Back to the plot – the disciples returned to Jerusalem to wait for the Advocate, something we will hear more about in a couple of weeks when we celebrate Pentecost. In the meantime, as we are also Disciples of Christ, let us ask, through the power of the Holy Spirit that came to us in our Baptism, for courage to go out and show the love of God to all we encounter. In a lot of situations, actions can speak much louder than words – currently, perhaps helping our isolated neighbours by doing some shopping for them, you know the sort of thing. Our kindness and generosity is showing, through our actions, that the love of God in Jesus is with us all now, even if through our dimly lit sight we cannot see Him. Jesus has ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, but he is also with us now. We don't have to look to the skies for that special cloud, Jesus is here and accompanies us on our journey through life, *now*. And when we finally understand that Jesus is in everyone we meet, then the veil will be lifted and we will see clearly the kingdom of heaven, rather than only the glimpses we see now and then. Amen