

Dear friends

I hope you are all well. As I am sure you all know, tomorrow we enter "Step 3" of the roadmap out of lockdown. As far as that affects churches, the main difference is that we can now hold weddings and christenings with up to 30 people being present, and I am very much looking forward to resuming those times of celebration. Today we will be reading the banns of marriage for Thomas and Amy, Philip and Haich, and Steven and Alice for the third and final time at each of our services (Merevale at 11am and Baxterley at 4.30pm). Let us pray for them, and for everyone who is preparing for marriage, especially where plans are uncertain due to the pandemic. The hope is that from 21 June we will enter step 4, and restrictions on numbers will be eased further, but there can't be any certainty about that as yet. Our prayers continue.

Today is the Sunday after Ascension Day, and the video worship this weekend is a little different from usual, in that rather being recorded by the ministry team at home or in an otherwise empty church, we filmed it at the evening Ascension Day Holy Communion Service on Thursday at Hurley Church, with just a bit of editing later to add in hymns and captions. So there are a few more noises off than usual! Attached is the order of service and the text of my sermon (which will be getting another couple of airings at today's services!), along with the weekly newsletter.

<https://youtu.be/-vomPFJl9Z0>



[A Service for Ascension Day](https://youtu.be/-vomPFJl9Z0)

A Service of Holy Communion for Ascension Day, filmed at the Church of the Resurrection, Hurley, on the evening of Thursday, 13 May 2021.

[youtu.be](https://youtu.be/-vomPFJl9Z0)

Finally, as many of you know, my daughter Debbie has not been well, and so just a quick update. She is now in QE hospital in Birmingham, where her consultant is based, and where she is getting good treatment and feeling much better. We are hopeful that she will be home by next weekend. I am very grateful for all the prayers and support with which we've been surrounded. I know we are not the only family to be going through some tough times, but I hope you don't mind me keeping you updated.

With love and prayers

John

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Ascension Day Sermon 2021

Acts 1.1—11 Luke 24.44-end

It may seem rather strange to begin a sermon for Ascension Day by focussing on a Gospel passage that is more associated with Easter than the Ascension, but that is what I am going to do. It is the part of St John's Gospel where Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Jesus in the garden on the first day of the week after Jesus had been laid in the tomb. It is one of the most beautiful readings in the whole of the Bible, with a deep poignancy in this case of mistaken identity, when, looking through her veil of tears, Mary thinks that the figure she can see is the gardener. But then comes the flash of recognition when he speaks her name: "Mary". "Rabbouni!" she replies. "Teacher".

But it is the words that follow that speak to us today, as Jesus says to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father."

"Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father." You can picture the scene. Realising that this is Jesus, whom she loved, whom she thought was dead, indeed whom she knew had died, that he is standing before her in the flesh, her immediate instinct is to fling her arms around him and not let go. The one she loved, the one she thought she had lost for ever, has been returned to her. Who wouldn't cling on to his living, breathing body, in the warmest and most lasting of embraces?

We have learnt a lot this last year about the importance of physical contact. Phone calls, face time, a socially distanced wave through a window – these things are all very well, but they are no substitute for a hug. There will be many people in the country, and perhaps some of us, who will have heard the news about the lifting of restrictions on hugging friends and family with enormous joy and relief. There will be hugs, and some will last a long time.

So it is no wonder that Mary wants to keep Jesus in her arms, but it is not to be. He cannot stay on this earth. The ascension must happen. Mary, who let him go once, as he made his journey to the cross, must let him go again, ready for him to be taken up to the right hand of his heavenly Father.

So there is a sense in which the ascension of Jesus involves a process of letting go, of departure. Moving on to the account that we heard in Luke and in Acts, the gathered disciples are bidding farewell to Jesus, and he to them. This will be the last time that they see him, physically, here on earth.

But one of the extraordinary and perhaps surprising aspects of this story of the ascension is that this is a farewell without a trace of sorrow or sadness. In fact, quite the reverse. Listen again to how Luke's Gospel ends: "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."

This is the most joyful of goodbyes. The story of the ascension is not a story of loss. Partly, of course, that is because of the promise that Jesus will not leave them orphaned, but will send to them the Holy Spirit. God's presence will be known as a constant in the lives of all believers. But it is also because, in ascending to heaven, Jesus is blazing a trail that the rest of us will follow. This is not Jesus being separated from the rest of humanity, but taking humanity into the very heart of the Godhead. "Where I am, there you will be also", he had said to his disciples. Or, in the words that he spoke to Mary in the garden on that first Easter Day, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Christ's crucifixion, resurrection and ascension bring us the assurance of union with him and with the Father, now and into all eternity. Thanks be to God. Alleluia.

Keep Singing from Sarah

Hello everyone,

I hope you are keeping well.

Please find some suggested music below to accompany this Sunday's services (Sunday after Ascension Day)

12 - Alleluia, sing to Jesus - [Alleluia, Sing to Jesus \(Tune: Hyfrydol\) \[with lyrics for congregations\] - YouTube](#)

104 - Christ triumphant, ever reigning - [Christ Triumphant - YouTube](#)

84 - Breathe on me, breath of God - [CARLISLE-BREATH ON E, BREATH OF GOD - YouTube](#)

359 - Jesus shall reign - [Jesus shall reign \(Hymn with music and words\) - Isaac Watts - YouTube](#)

some extra...

Vi rekker våre hender frem (We raise our hands) - [Vi Rekker Våre Hender Frem - YouTube](#)

Veni Creator Berlioz - [Veni Creator Spiritus, H 141 - YouTube](#)

Let all the world Vaughan Williams - [King's College Cambridge Easter #26 Let all the World \[2014\]\[Vaughan Williams\] - YouTube](#)

Veni Sancte Spiritus Rizza - [Veni Sancte Spiritus - YouTube](#)

Let your restless hearts be still - [Let Your Restless Hearts Be Still - YouTube](#)

My peace I leave you - [Taizé - My peace - YouTube](#)

Despite the rain we have managed to get out this week. The girls doing sports clubs and Tom and I trying to keep up with some walks, a habit we are hoping to keep going from lockdown. In the garden our potatoes are through and tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers are coming along although not planted outside yet as we were waiting for some sun!! Our rhubarb has had a massive growth spurt and we are hoping for the first crumble of the year from it for pudding after Sunday Lunch

Today saw Emily's final ball crew training session in Nottingham and she is getting very excited at the prospect of meeting Venus Williams and Johanna Konta in a few weeks time!! I am less excited thinking about the journey to and from the tournament every day to drop her off and collect but am so proud of her for getting in and what an amazing opportunity!! Also it gives me chance to look around IKEA which was a real treat once I discovered it today - biggest shop I have been in for months ha ha!

I do hope you and your families are doing ok. We send you lots of love and look forward to hopefully catching up with you in person soon.

Take care

Love

Sarah, Tom and girls xxxx