

A Service for Ascension Day 21 May 2020

Welcome

Welcome to our service for Ascension Day using material from the Iona Community.

The Day of Ascension doesn't seem to fare very well in most Churches. In fact, this 'day' doesn't even get a Sunday to itself; it is observed on the Thursday between the 6th and 7th Sundays of Easter. No wonder so many folks, including ministers, don't know much about it.

So why pay attention to the Ascension of Jesus?

In part, because the story is a reminder that the earthly ministry of Jesus has ended: at Pentecost, the torch is passed on to the disciples, and down to us through all the centuries. *Now*, the story says, *it is up to us – we are the ones who are called to be more compassionate, more accepting, more forgiving, more just: more faithful.*

The story also confirms what the Resurrection first showed – that Jesus is now the Risen One, the One who sits at the right hand of God, the One who continues to work – with us, through us, despite us – to bring about that new heaven, that new earth, that new hope, that new life, which has always been God's intention for all creation.

Because Jesus is at the right hand of God, with authority and power, we can trust that such power will continue to pour out God's grace upon us. The One who became fully human continues to bring our humanity, our brokenness, our possibilities, our hopes and dreams into the heart of God. We are not forgotten by the One who came in a humble birth, and died the death of a common criminal. And God, whose heart broke when Jesus died, who brought him out of the grave, who gave Jesus new life, will also not forget us, but will do the same for all people.

We gather in this place;
some of us empty, some of us broken:

YEARNING FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT TO FILL US.

We come, among fellow seekers who have shown us the way:

TRUSTING THAT GOD WILL CONTINUE TO ILLUMINATE OUR HEARTS.

THAT GRACE-FILLED OURSELVES, WE MAY SERVE OTHERS;
THAT HEALED, WE MAY BRING HOPE TO THE WORLD.

Call to reconciliation

Called to proclaim repentance,
we are reluctant to look at our own failings.
Invited to witness to God's loving forgiveness of sins, we would rather not speak
aloud of our own.
Let us trust in the One who offers us hope and healing, praying;

GOD MOST HIGH,
YOU CALL US TO PROCLAIM
A GOSPEL WE FIND DIFFICULT TO PRACTISE.
WE WATCH OUR CLOCKS TO MAKE SURE
WE SPEND MORE TIME WITH OURSELVES THAN WITH YOU.
WE ARE HESITANT TO WITNESS TO YOUR POWER FROM ON HIGH, FEELING
UNCERTAIN OF YOUR PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES.

FORGIVE US, GOD OF LIGHT.
FILL US WITH THE HEALING PRESENCE OF YOUR SPIRIT,
THAT WE MAY PROCLAIM YOUR GOOD NEWS
AS WE PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE AND SUFFERING OF OUR WORLD, AS DID
YOUR SON, OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR, JESUS CHRIST.

Silence

Choosing to set aside judgement, God gives us justice;
choosing to let go of punishment, God fills us with peace;
choosing to release anger,
God's steadfast love rests upon us.

FORGIVEN, REDEEMED, RESTORED – WE TELL EVERYONE,
THROUGH THE LIVES WE LEAD, WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US. THANKS BE
TO GOD. AMEN

Bible readings: Acts 1:1–11

Dear Theophilus, in the first volume of this book I wrote on everything that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he said good-bye to the apostles, the ones he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. After his death, he presented himself alive to them in many different settings over a period of forty days. In face-to-face meetings, he talked to them about things concerning the

kingdom of God. As they met and ate meals together, he told them that they were on no account to leave Jerusalem but “must wait for what the Father promised: the promise you heard from me. John baptized in water; you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. And soon.”

When they were together for the last time they asked, “Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?”

He told them, “You don’t get to know the time. Timing is the Father’s business. What you’ll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world.”

These were his last words. As they watched, he was taken up and disappeared in a cloud. They stood there, staring into the empty sky. Suddenly two men appeared—in white robes! They said, “You Galileans!—why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly—and mysteriously—as he left.”

Psalm 47

Clap your hands, all you nations;
shout to God with cries of joy.

For the Lord Most High is awesome,
the great King over all the earth.

He subdued nations under us,
peoples under our feet.

He chose our inheritance for us,
the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.

God has ascended amid shouts of joy,
the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets.

Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.

For God is the King of all the earth;
sing to him a psalm of praise.

God reigns over the nations;
God is seated on his holy throne.

The nobles of the nations assemble
as the people of the God of Abraham,
for the kings of the earth belong to God;
he is greatly exalted.

A Meditation:

We stand
with our mouths agape, staring up at the sky,
wondering,
arguing,
where you have gone, when
you will come back, and so,
we keep our hearts closed tight,

not seeing you
in the families waiting at the foodbank

we shuffle our feet,
the dust covering our sin-scuffed shoes,

thus
unable to see your footprints
leading us to your Kingdom;

certain we have all the facts, convinced by the arguments
of our favourite commentators,
we shutter our minds, until you come along,

your voice
singing
glad songs of praise.

Prayers of concern

Exalted God:
you are the constant lover
who never forsakes us;
you are the mother
who cradles her children;
you are the teacher
patiently repeating your words for us. We worship you.

Jesus Christ:
in you
we are convinced
God loves us;
through you,

we are formed
into your people;
with you,
we serve those
the world has forgotten. We follow you.

Holy Spirit:
you are the power
that gives us peace;
you are the wisdom
that reveals the broken in our midst;
you are the spokesperson of the voiceless
to whom we are deaf. We welcome you.

God in Community, Holy and One,
we lift our prayers to you as Jesus taught us, saying ...

**Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who
trespass against us.
And lead us not into
temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing:
We will not cling tightly to the past: BUT GO FORTH AND SERVE OUR GOD. We
will not spend time looking up to heaven:
BUT GO AND SERVE CHRIST'S BROTHERS AND SISTERS HERE ON
EARTH. We will not hoard our gifts:
BUT SHARE THE SPIRIT WHICH DWELLS IN US. AMEN