

Evening Prayer for Ascension Day

Opening Hymn O worship the King

1 O worship the King all-glorious above,
O gratefully sing his power and his love:
our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise.

2 O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

3 O measureless Might, ineffable Love,
whom angels delight to hymn thee above!
they humbler creation, though feeble their lays,
with true adoration shall sing to thy praise!

O God, make speed to save us.

All O Lord, make haste to help us.

- 1 Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
you that by night stand in the house of the Lord.
- 2 Lift up your hands towards the sanctuary
and bless the Lord.
- 3 The Lord who made heaven and earth
give you blessing out of Zion.

Psalm 134

**All 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.**

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us
to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise
now and for ever.

All Amen.

Psalm 47

- 1 Clap your hands together, all you peoples;
O sing to God with shouts of joy.
- 2 For the Lord Most High is to be feared;
he is the great King over all the earth.
- 3 He subdued the peoples under us
and the nations under our feet.
- 4 He has chosen our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob, whom he loves.
- 5 God has gone up with a merry noise,
the Lord with the sound of the trumpet.
- 6 O sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
- 7 For God is the King of all the earth;
sing praises with all your skill.
- 8 God reigns over the nations;
God has taken his seat upon his holy throne.
- 9 The nobles of the peoples are gathered together
with the people of the God of Abraham.
- 10 For the powers of the earth belong to God
and he is very highly exalted.

**All 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.**

1st reading – Ephesians 1:15-end

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the

head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

A song of Christ's glory

- 1 Christ Jesus was in the form of God,
but he did not cling to equality with God.
- 2 He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant,
and was born in our human likeness.
- 3 Being found in human form he humbled himself,
and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.
- 4 Therefore God has highly exalted him,
and bestowed on him the name above every name,
- 5 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth;
- 6 And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2.5–11

**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.**

2nd reading – Luke 24:44-end

Then he 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.

Sermon – Rev Paul Day

Praise, power and prayer

When we think of those first followers of Jesus after his death we tend to think of a group of frightened individuals gathered in a locked room; hiding from the

authorities, fearful for their lives. That's the picture we have on that first Easter Sunday as Jesus appeared to them in the upper room – the time when Thomas was not with them. We can read the account in John's gospel.

But that's not the picture we have here just a few weeks later.

Here we have a story of something that happened outside, in a public place, in the village Bethany – a place where Jesus and his followers were well known. There is no hint of fear. No hint of any one on the look-out for the authorities. No hint of any concern. And it is here where Jesus ascends to heaven.

But, perhaps even more surprising, is what happened after his ascension. His disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Their experience of the risen Jesus; their listening to his words as he helped them to understand the scriptures and what was said about him; the assurance given by his promise to them of the Holy Spirit – all these things would have reassured them and given them confidence.

But the words that struck me here were joy and blessing. The disciples were continually praising God. Their joy and excitement could not be contained; they had to express it in praise. How different from those frightened followers of a few weeks ago.

Even though things were not clear; even though the future was still uncertain; even though just a few weeks ago it seemed that all their hopes had been dashed – despite all this they were praising God.

And praising him because of what he had said and what he had promised.

Lessons for us perhaps in this time of uncertainty, when we are fearful for ourselves and those we love, and when the future looks uncertain. We too can still praise God because of all his promises to us.

Before he was taken from them Jesus told them to stay in the city until they had been clothed with power from on high. To wait for the Holy Spirit. We thought a little about the Holy Spirit on Sunday. We recalled that Jesus described the Holy Spirit as “another advocate” – one who would speak up for us, one who would empower us to speak up for him. One whose presence with us would be as if Jesus himself were with us.

And we will be thinking more about the Spirit a week on Sunday when we celebrate Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. We will be thinking more about what the presence and power of the Spirit might mean for us as followers of Jesus here in Shirley.

But it has always seemed a bit strange to me that they had to wait 10 more days for the Spirit to come. Why wait? Why couldn't it have happened there and then? Why couldn't this power be given to them straight away? Why couldn't the mission of the church begin then? The answer I think is in how those 10 days were spent.

As we have seen, they returned to Jerusalem full of joy, and were continually in the temple. In Acts – the second volume of Luke's account of the life of Jesus and the early church - he says that during this time they devoted themselves continually to prayer. Praying, we can assume, for what lay ahead of them; for what they would do once the power from on high came. Similar prayers, I suspect, to the prayer that Paul was praying for the believers in Ephesus in that first reading from Ephesians.

And it is this waiting and praying that has meant that the period between Ascension and Pentecost has always been set aside by the church as a special time of prayer. A time to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit; a time to pray for the mission of the church; a time to pray for ourselves and our churches and our communities. We know that the time is just 10 days – those first disciples did not know how long it would be, but they prayed continually nonetheless, preparing themselves for the task ahead.

Over the past few years the Archbishops have revived this ancient practice of setting aside this time for prayer under the heading of Thy Kingdom Come, coming from the familiar words of the Lord's Prayer. They are encouraging churches and individuals across the country and across the world to make a special effort in these days between Ascension and Pentecost to pray for the mission of the church and the power of the Spirit. And that has never been more important than now in the midst of this pandemic. The need for prayer.

This year in Shirley we are planning two things. First we have produced a very simple prayer diary. For those who receive paper copies, this should be in your pack this week. For others the link was sent last weekend and again this week. For each day there is a short reading from a Psalm and then a suggestion for what we might pray for. So today we are suggesting that we pray for our neighbours and our friends.

And the way we do this will be different for each one of us. We don't need to use fancy words, we don't need to be in a 'special' place. (though it's possible that you might find special words or a particular place helpful). It could be as simple as, later this evening, when you are on your doorstep showing your appreciation for the carers, that you take a look up and down the street and mention the names of the people you see to God. Ask him to bless them and encourage them. Mention them, even if you don't know their names. God knows them.

So please use the diary. Pray for our parish. Pray for those who help us and encourage us. Pray for each other. Particularly during these difficult times.

And the second thing we plan to do is to walk the Parish boundary so that we can pray for the whole Parish. Beating the bounds of the Parish has a long tradition at this time of year – I recall in a previous parish Rogation walks when the church processed around the parish led by the choir in robes, stopping at various points and asking for God's blessing on farms, businesses, people and communities.

On Bank Holiday Monday I invite any of you who feel able to walk part (or all if you are very enthusiastic) of the Parish Boundary. Stop occasionally as you walk to pray for the homes and businesses and schools and community spaces. Pray for God's blessing on Shirley.

It would be helpful if you could let me know which part of the boundary you will be walking so we can be sure the parish is covered. If you are not able to walk, then simply pray for your street and the neighbouring streets. You can do this, of course, from your own home. You should have a copy or a link to the information about walking the boundary.

Two simple things that we can commit ourselves to over these next 10 days.

So as we prepare ourselves for celebrating the coming of the Spirit to those first believers at Pentecost, let us continue to praise God; let us praise him for the Spirit and the power which the Spirit brings to us and let us pray for ourselves and the community in which we live and work and worship.

Magnificat

- 1 My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour;
he has looked with favour on his lowly servant.

- 2 From this day all generations will call me blessed;
the Almighty has done great things for me
and holy is his name.
- 3 He has mercy on those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
- 4 He has shown strength with his arm
and has scattered the proud in their conceit,
- 5 Casting down the mighty from their thrones
and lifting up the lowly.
- 6 He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
- 7 He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
to remember his promise of mercy,
- 8 The promise made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children for ever.

Luke 1.46-55

**All 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.**

Prayers

Collect for the day

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.

Lighten our darkness,
Lord, we pray,
and in your great mercy
defend us from all perils and dangers of this night,
for the love of your only Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.

All Amen.

All 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.
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.

All The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.
Amen.

Closing hymn: Immortal Invisible

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life Thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish, but nought changeth Thee.

Great Father of Glory, pure Father of Light
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render, O help us to see:
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.