

twelvebaskets



ASCENSION B

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

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Ascension Sunday - Year B
12th May 2024



Order of Service

Call to worship

Hymn:

329 STF - Jesus, the First and the Last OR

565 STF - Only by grace can we enter

Opening Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

All Age Talk

Hymn:

15 STF - The splendour of the King OR

305 STF - Low in the grave he lay

Readings: Acts 1:1-11, Ephesians 1:15-23, Luke 24:44-53

Hymn:

331 STF - King of kings, majesty OR

318 STF - Christ our King before creation

Reflections on the readings

Hymn:

227 STF - Brightest and best of the sons of the morning OR

134 STF - Christ whose glory fills the skies

Intercessions

Offering / collection

Blessing the offering

Hymn:

503 STF - Love divine all loves excelling OR

615 STF - Let love be real

Blessing

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Call to worship

Here we are Lord, gathered in your name

Here we are, come to worship you and learn more of your call on our lives,

Here we are to celebrate your ascension and to seek to 'have a little heaven down here' as we worship.

Come amongst us, by your Spirit, we pray,

Amen.¹

Hymn:

329 STF - Jesus, the First and the Last OR

565 STF - Only by grace can we enter

Opening Prayers

Let us pray.

From the very beginning, you were there God.

In the first moments of creation, amongst big bangs, creative sparks and a divine word spoken, you were there.

At the very end, you will be there, our God.

When meaningfulness collapses, life ends, universes fade and creation stops creating, you will be there, our God.

You are Alpha. You are Omega.

You are A. You are Z.

You are first and last.

We praise you, God of the beginnings and God of the endings.

God of the first breath, and God of the last.

God of the labour pains and God of the dying moments.

We praise you, God of all time, in this moment, this time.

God of all grace, we recognise that we have often fallen short of your plans for us. In a moment of quiet, we hand over our confessions to you.

Silence

Even as we come to you, we know that you love and accept us, just as we are. You are at the beginning and the end, and you are here with us, always.

Come amongst us, spirit of the living God.

Amen.²

We say together the Lord's Prayer

¹ Call to worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

All Age Talk

Ascension Sunday is here! This is one of those important Sundays in the life of the church - it's the moment that comes at the conclusion of the Easter story, a 'season finale' if you like! But, before we dive into the story and what it might have to say to us today, let's see how we can do at a 'recap' of the Jesus story so far that gets us to this moment in his narrative arc...

We'll do this in the form of a quiz, but there aren't really any points!

Question 1 - what's the name of the season that comes before Easter?

You could add these clues if it helps: It's 40 days long, starts with Ash Wednesday...

Lent - yes of course. The time in the church year where we remember Jesus wandering in the wilderness 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.

Question 2 - What is the name of the last Sunday in Lent, the one that comes one week before Easter Sunday?

You could add this clue: you know, the one where Jesus rides in on a donkey!

Palm Sunday! Jesus enters Jerusalem to much celebration - crowds of people waving palms and praising his name! We might have received palm crosses that day to remind ourselves of that day.

Question 3 - In Holy Week (the week between Palm Sunday and Easter Day), what is the Thursday called?

Clue: it starts with an M and sounds a bit like a different day of the week!

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.

Question 4 - What happened on the next day, the Friday?

Clue: it isn't very nice, and involves a cross...

Yes, Good Friday - the day we know as when Jesus died on the cross. It's a sad day, but an important part of the story...because of what comes next!

Question 5 - What miracle happened on Easter Sunday?

No clues this time!

Jesus was raised from the dead - yes! 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. 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!

Yet...Jesus does spoil the surprise, but the disciples are too focused on what else Jesus says, and we'll hear about that story later in our service (there's the teaser-trailer for the next episode!)

In that story, Jesus ascended to Heaven, hence why we call this Sunday “Ascension Sunday” and set up next week’s special - 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:

15 STF - The splendour of the King OR

305 STF - Low in the grave he lay

Readings: Acts 1:1-11, Ephesians 1:15-23, Luke 24:44-53

Hymn:

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Reflections on the readings

One of the most influential books about productivity in the last couple of decades was Stephen Covey’s ‘Seven Habits of Highly Effective People’, of which perhaps his most famous habit is: begin with the end in mind.

This phrase now appears in all sorts of books about work, leadership, management, on Instagram posts, PowerPoint presentations and key note talks. That’s probably because it’s quite good advice! But, in the context of the Christian faith, that changes slightly doesn’t it? What is our ‘end’? And do we recognise Jesus having this ‘end in mind’ attitude in his ministry?

Let’s dive into Luke 24, our Gospel reading for today, and see what it has to offer for us...

This is a poignant passage that marks the culmination of Jesus’ earthly ministry and the beginning of his disciples’ mission in the world. This section of Scripture captures the moment when Jesus, after his resurrection, appears to his disciples to reinforce the continuity of his teachings with the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. He shows them that yes - this is the end - but it is also the beginning. Perhaps he demonstrates the connections between this ending, and his humble beginnings? Like the Emmaus road story, we don’t get to hear exactly what unpacking Jesus does of the Scriptures here, we don’t get to have our ‘minds opened’ in quite the same way. But we do have the advantage of hindsight, and two thousand years of scholarship and reflection on these words.

³ All Age Talk written by Tim Annan-Hood

Pause a moment. What is Jesus saying to you today? How are you understanding these Scriptures? Is there something you need to hear, or reflect on, or learn from, from our readings and act of worship so far. I'll be quiet for a minute and let you think.

Hold a minute's silence (usually a good idea to time this as it's hard to tell how long a minute is when you are at the front, it might feel like an hour!)

Does anybody want to share their reflection? It's absolutely fine if not, but if someone has a simple, or burning, response to what's happening in these words, in this space today, then I'd love to hear it...

Give people a moment, and make space for conversation if it breaks out (if you are worried about time, you could always cut the conversation questions at the end of this reflection if there is a really rich conversation here. Remember, just because you are leading this reflection doesn't mean you need to know the answers - you can discover together!)

Jesus opens their minds to understand the Scriptures - what a wonderful phrase - and he asserts that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, and then ascends into heaven. For us, today, I'd like to see three themes emerging from this scripture that might help us today: understanding, mission, and transformation.

1. Understanding and Openness

Firstly, Jesus' act of opening the disciples' minds to understand the Scriptures can serve as a metaphor for our continual pursuit of understanding - not only of our faith and sacred texts but also of the world around us. Jesus here is inviting us to approach our faith journey with open minds and hearts, ready to see the connections between these ancient texts and the pressing issues of our time. As Karl Barthes would have put it 'to have the Bible in one hand and today's newspaper in the other'.

This act of understanding is not passive; it's a dynamic, ongoing process that challenges us to engage critically and compassionately with our beliefs and how they inform our actions in the world.

2. Mission and Inclusivity

Secondly, the directive to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations is a call to inclusivity and mission. It's a reminder that the message of Jesus is not limited to a select few but is offered to all, regardless of nationality, race, or status. This universal aspect of Jesus' message encourages us to embrace diversity and to work towards a community that reflects the inclusive love of God. Not just people who look and sound like us, or people who seem 'acceptable' or 'nice Christian people', but ALL people. Jesus couldn't be clearer, and this remains a critical emphasis of the Methodist denomination - it is Wesley's absolute insistence on the all-ness of salvation that sets our agenda for an inclusive, diverse, invitational approach to mission. Mission that knows no borders.

Perhaps this challenges us to consider how we, as a church, are called to be agents of forgiveness and reconciliation in a divided world.

3. Finally, Transformation and Hope.

The third theme in this passage, that I want to draw your attention to: the ascension of Jesus signifies not an end but a beginning - the promise of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. This is what it looks like to begin with the end in mind...to begin our work as Christians with the same energy as Christ finishes his. Here, Jesus's ascension symbolises a moment of transformation and empowerment, where the disciples are called to move

forward in hope, even in the absence of their physical leader. This narrative invites us to reflect on how we are called to continue the work of Jesus today, empowered by the Spirit to bring hope, healing, and transformation to our communities and the world.

In conclusion, Luke 24 offers us a rich tapestry of themes that are deeply relevant for a progressive and liberal Christian audience. It challenges us to pursue deeper understanding, to embrace our mission of inclusivity and reconciliation, and to participate in the transformative work of the Spirit in the world. As we reflect on this passage, let us be inspired to live out our faith boldly and compassionately, embodying the love and justice of Jesus in all that we do.

One of the ways we can do that is in conversation together - recognising that no one person in this room holds all the answers, and our Triune God is always inviting us into conversation, into community, into togetherness.

Here are four discussion questions based on the themes identified, let us break into groups, pick one question, start there, and see how many you cover during the time allowed... (Probably around 10 minutes, depending on timings elsewhere in the service).

1. Understanding and Openness: In what ways can we, as a community, foster a deeper understanding of our faith in relation to contemporary issues? How can we maintain an openness to new interpretations of Scripture that speak to the challenges of our time?
2. Mission and Inclusivity: Jesus' directive to preach repentance and forgiveness to all nations suggests a call to inclusivity. How can our church community better reflect this call in our outreach efforts, ensuring that we are welcoming and accessible to all, especially those who have felt marginalised or excluded from religious spaces?
3. Transformation and Hope: The ascension of Jesus marks a moment of transformation and the promise of the Holy Spirit. In what ways are we being called to transform our community and society at large? How can we embody hope in our actions, especially in contexts of despair or division?
4. Practical Application: Reflecting on the directive to be witnesses to all nations, what are some practical ways our community can live out this mission in our local context? How can we leverage our collective resources, talents, and passions to address the needs of those around us and beyond?⁴

Hymn:

227 STF - Brightest and best of the sons of the morning OR

134 STF - Christ whose glory fills the skies

Prayers of intercession

God of our hearts,

Come into our feelings, our emotions, teaching us the art of love.

Show us how to embrace your world and your people, with arms of grace.

Guide us in each moment, that the very impulses of our bodies might be tuned to you.

God of love, enter our hearts,

And tune your world to love.

God of our minds,

⁴ Reflection written by Tim Baker

Come into our thoughts, our intellects, and help us to focus the work of our brains on you.

Show us how to be agents of love in the workplace, at school, in our reading, our writing, our thinking.

Guide us to come to know you more, through the power you have given us in our minds.

God of love, enter our hearts,
And tune your world to love.

God of our families,

Come into the places we call home, that we might show and discover something about you in our houses, at our mealtimes, in our beds.

Show us how to love each other, and reveal your nature of love to us, through our relationships with those closest to us – our family and closest friends.

Guide us in the difficulties and struggles that come with our family lives, and the suffering of those closest to us – bring them your love.

God of love, enter our hearts,
And tune your world to love.

God of the Church,

Come into the midst of your people, come to bring healing, to bring unity, to build a movement that can shape the world for good.

Show us how to love each other, to heal broken rifts within churches and between denominations. How to reach out into the world around us, bringing peace, not division, bringing love, and not conflict.

Guide us in our decision making and our worship, our committees and young church, our church councils and prayer meetings, bring the church closer to your design, your hopes for humanity.

We pray for the circuit, for all those looking for a fresh start. Lord, bring your newness, your refreshing and re-charging love. We pray for this church, as your people here begin afresh their journey with you.

God of love, enter our hearts,
And tune your world to love.

God of the whole world,

Come into this suffering, unequal planet, bringing peace and harmony where there is war and discord.

Show your love to those who cannot see it this morning – those tied up in war and conflict, battling with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, those struggling with a life of poverty.

God of love, enter our hearts,
And tune your world to love.

God of our hearts - help us to be agents of love across your world, in the way we live our lives, in the people we meet and the situations we hold influence.

Amen.⁵

⁵ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

We will now take up the offering.

God of all grace,

You have blessed us with so much, and we recognise your gifts to us as grace, as something beyond what we could possibly deserve or earn.

But, in the spirit of grace, we wish to offer something to you too - our financial gifts, and the gifts of our lives, energy, hearts and minds. We commit them to your service again this day. Amen.⁶

Hymn:

503 STF - Love divine all loves excelling OR

615 STF - Let love be real

Blessing

Let love be real, with no manipulation, no secret wish to harness or control.

Let the love of Christ take root in you, grow deep and bloom in you, and burst out of you to touch all that you meet.

May you know that you are truly loved, and offer love, real love, to those around you and around the world,

In Jesus' name,

Amen.⁷

⁶ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker