

Worship for 7th Sunday of Easter (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to this time of worship. We hope you find it stimulating, comforting and enjoyable. Though we still cannot meet in our church buildings we know that the church as the body of Christ continues to meet in Spirit. If any of you would like to take part, then please get in touch with me on revpeter.mwc@gmail.com

THE PREPARATION

Today, as we are between Ascension and Pentecost, we are aware of our need of God and consider what Scripture says about casting our anxieties on Him.

StF 297 –Born in song

- 1. Born in song!**
God's people have always been singing.
Born in song!
Hearts and voices raised.
So today we worship together;
God alone is worthy to be praised!
- 2. Praise to God!**
For he is the one who has made us.
Praise to God!
We his image bear.
Heaven and earth are full of his glory;
let creation praise him everywhere.
- 3. Christ is King!**
He left all the glory of heaven.
Christ is King!
Born to share in our pain;
crucified, for sinners atoning,
risen, exalted, soon to come again.
- 4. Sing the song!**
God's Spirit is poured out among us.
Sing the song!
He has made us anew.

**Ev'ry member part of his Body;
given his power, his will to seek and do.**

- 5. Tell the world!**
All power to Jesus is given.
Tell the world!
He is with us always.
Spread the word, that all may receive him;
every tongue confess and sing his praise.

Call to worship

Sing to God, sing praises to his name;
lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds:
his name is the Lord.

Awesome is God in his sanctuary;
he gives power and strength to his people:
his name is the Lord.

Prayer of approach

(Keep a moment of silence between each line)

We lay aside our busyness,
and pray for rest.

We lay aside our distractedness,
and pray for peace.

We lay aside our dissatisfaction,
and pray for gratitude.

We lay aside our fear,
and pray for courage.

We lay aside our divisions,
and pray for unity.

We lay aside all that separates us from you,
and pray for your blessing.

Amen.

Prayer of adoration

God of majesty and might,
your glory shines throughout the universe:
from the highest heaven to the deepest sea;
in all the creatures you have made;
in the seasons that shape our living.
Your glory shines through who you are
and through what you do.
The power of your glory
touches your creation and exalts it.
To you we offer our worship;
to you we offer our praise;
before you we come in adoration. **Amen.**

Prayer of confession

Loving God, we humble ourselves before you.
We are not worthy even to call upon your name,
but we know that you are merciful in judgement.
Forgive us our false pretences, our prejudices,
our arrogance and disrespect for the world you
created and for the people you give us to love
and to respect.
Turn us away from the sins we have committed.
Amend what we are and help us to walk with
you.

(Silence to confess our failings)

May the living God
raise us from despair,
give us victory over sin
and set us free in Christ. **Amen.**

StF 65 – Sing of the Lord's goodness

1. **Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all
wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever,
faithful to the end of days.**

***Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.***

***Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.***

2. **Power he has wielded, honour is his
garment,
risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken, one bread he has
broken,
new life he now gives to all.**

***Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.***

3. **Courage in our darkness, comfort in our
sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the loving God.**

***Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.***

4. **Praise him with you singing, praise him with
the trumpet,
praise him with the lute and harp;
praise him with the cymbals, praise him
with your dancing,
praise God till the end of days.**

***Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.***

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1st Reading Acts 1:1-11

¹In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴While staying with them, he 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; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." ⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But 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." ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward 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."

Psalm Psalm 47:1-9 & Psalm 93:1-5

Psalm 47

¹Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy.
²For the LORD, the Most High, is awesome, a great king over all the earth.
³He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet.

⁴He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah

⁵God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.

⁶Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.

⁷For God is the king of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm.

⁸God is king over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.

⁹The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted.

Psalm 93

¹The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved;

²your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting.

³The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring.

⁴More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the LORD!

⁵Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.

Epistle Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I 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, ¹⁸so 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, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God 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, ²¹far 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. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Gospel *Luke 24:44-53*

⁴⁴ 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." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ 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." ⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³ and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Sermon

What next? – mission after the Ascension

I heard a rumour recently that Aaron Sorokin is bringing back the American TV series the *West Wing*. I used to love this drama about an American President called Josiah Bartlet. He's a Democrat, a Catholic and a Nobel prize-winning economist – so very different from current reality! But one of President Bartlet's favourite sayings is, 'What's next?'

'What's next?' You can imagine that also being on the lips of the disciples of Jesus as they came to terms with the Ascension. After all, they have spent the last three years of their lives trailing around after this wandering Galilean rabbi, never quite sure of where they might end up. Now they have gone through the trauma of arrest, trial and brutal crucifixion. Their hopes and dreams have been trampled underfoot by religious intolerance and military might.

Added to that is the utter confusion of the resurrection! Is he dead or isn't he? And just when they were getting used to having Jesus back among them, post-Ascension, he's gone again. What a rollercoaster of emotions, taking these poor disciples to the very extremes of hope and despair. What's next?

PATIENCE - that's what's next: they are told to wait. Jesus is as enigmatic as ever, offering no certainty, no timeframe, nothing to be getting on with in the meantime. Just wait.

After two months of lockdown, we all know the frustration of waiting without a timeframe. Some of us have managed to learn new things, develop new patterns of work and study, busy ourselves with tidying home and garden. I suspect that most of us have struggled at some point or other with the not-knowing. I am incredibly grateful to those, including members of the Royal family, who have promoted good mental health and wellbeing during this stressful and anxious time.

The disciples, it would seem, also get tired of waiting. In the absence of any firm plan for the future, they revert to what they know. Since Jesus chose twelve from among the many disciples who followed him - a sort of inner core – the post-Ascension Christians want to maintain that pattern. So they choose Matthias by lots, an apostle we hear nothing more about in the pages of the NT. It begs the question whether the disciples jumped the gun when they should have waited for Saul of Tarsus to come along? They

went for the safe option, sticking with what they knew. In the face of such confusion, it is easy to see why they looked to their past for answers.

Yet, there is something about waiting that's about letting go of the familiar in order to be open to the new. Can we allow our hands, our diaries, to be empty long enough to allow God to fill them?

In the patience of waiting, Jesus' disciples remember the PROMISE they have been offered. One will come to act as advocate and comforter, companion and guide. Christians know now that it was the promise of the Spirit at Pentecost, but what did they think would happen?

The rest of the story of the Acts of the Apostles might be summed up as following the God of surprises. Peter and his followers assumed that belief in Jesus also meant continuity with Judaism. If you want to follow Jesus then you must be like him, i.e., Jewish. It took some hard arguing from Paul and a vision from God to confront Peter with the new reality of total inclusion.

We know that Saul of Tarsus was eventually to join the apostles, someone totally from outside the original group, someone in fact who would not have been eligible to stand in the original contest for the number twelve slot on the team. Yet it was Paul who brought the message from God which challenged the continuity agenda.

At this anxious time, it seems we are faced with another 'what's next?' moment. Our economic and political systems, our models of leadership, our community life, our theologies and church life, for the most part, have been unable to cope with the global threat of Covid-19. So, for most of the world, this is time of experimentation, finding our way in the darkness of ignorance, hoping for a breakthrough.

The Wesleys knew too what it was like to face a world in turmoil. The eighteenth century saw the

birth of the European Enlightenment, which fuelled the political eruptions of the American and French Revolutions. It was also the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution which radically transformed the lives of the very poorest in society.

In the midst of all that upheaval, the early Methodists encountered a church institution for which preservation had become stagnation, when doing things right had prevented the church from doing the right thing. So John Wesley risked being seen as a revolutionary in his preaching and pastoral mission, an abominable thing for a High Church Tory to be branded!

The Wesleys grasped the most radical part of the Ascension agenda – its POWER. Whatever the mechanics of the Ascension itself, this act takes Jesus beyond the limitations of history and place. His presence becomes limitless and, with it, the power and scope of his love. More than this, in leaving and sending the Spirit, the risen Christ distributes his power to those whom the world robs of power, influence and dignity.

As we remain in lockdown, many of us have experienced the misery of powerlessness. All we can do, it seems, is wait for others to tell us what to do. But the message of the Ascension is of an empowerment that subverts the patterns of this world. Even in the midst of lockdown, each one of us is given AGENCY, the power to be part of the transformation of the world. I know it sounds ridiculous, but no more ridiculous than a bunch of Galilean fishermen taking on the Roman Empire - and winning! The God of the universe calls us into partnership by the power of love.

I was once at a staff dinner, years ago, for the university department where I worked, when a colleague I barely knew approached me. 'You're a Methodist, aren't you?' she said. 'Well,' she went on, 'I was raised a Methodist and went to a Methodist school in S Africa. And every day, we

were told that we could change the world. And because we could, we must!’

The future is no less uncertain, scary and exciting now for us as for those eleven disciples left after the Ascension. Like them we must be prepared to have our minds blown open by God’s radical, boundless and creative future.

The question is: are we ready to say to God – What’s next?

StF 300 – Hail the day that sees him rise

1. **Hail the day that sees him rise, *Alleluia!*
ravished from our wistful eyes! *Alleluia!*
Christ, awhile to mortals given, *Alleluia!*
reascends his native heaven: *Alleluia!***
2. **There the glorious triumph waits: *Alleluia!*
lift your head, eternal gates; *Alleluia!*
wide unfold the radiant scene; *Alleluia!*
take the King of Glory in! *Alleluia!***
3. **Him though highest heaven receives,
Alleluia!
still he loves the earth he leaves; *Alleluia!*
though returning to his throne, *Alleluia!*
still he calls the world his own: *Alleluia!***
4. **See! He lifts his hands above; *Alleluia!*
see! He shows his prints of love; *Alleluia!*
hark! His gracious lips bestow *Alleluia!*
blessings on his Church below: *Alleluia!***
5. **Master, parted from our sight, *Alleluia!*
high above the azure height, *Alleluia!*
grant our hearts to you may rise, *Alleluia!*
following you beyond the skies: *Alleluia!***
6. **Cast ourselves before your throne, *Alleluia!*
here our heaven of heavens to own,
Alleluia!
there we shall with you remain, *Alleluia!*
partners of your endless reign: *Alleluia!***

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our
salvation. (Ps 95:1)

Lord, you are the maker of all good things **and we thank you.**

You made the grass, the flowers, the birds whose
songs lift our spirits **and we thank you.**

You made the wind, the rain, the sunshine which
powers all life **and we thank you.**

You made human beings, with the capacity to
love you and one another **and we thank you.**

You sent your Holy Spirit to enliven your servants
John and Charles Wesley, so that through
preaching and hymnody your word could be
shared **and we thank you.**

Time for God – Barbara Honeyball Young

**Time for God, time for God:
help us find time for God,
time for God,
time for God.**

**Time for God, time for God:
help us find time for God,
time for God,
time for God.**

**Time for God, time for God:
help us find time for God,
time for God,
time for God.**

Prayers of intercession

We pray for the Church throughout the world,
separated in body, but united in spirit. The Lord
hears our prayer, **thanks be to God**

We pray for the leaders of the nations in the
decisions they must make. We ask that their
intentions be good, and that they be blessed

with wisdom. The Lord hears our prayer, **thanks be to God**

We pray for the sick, the lonely and the bereaved. Be close to them and give them strength. The Lord hears our prayer, **thanks be to God**

We pray for those whose hearts are breaking and whose arms ache to hold those they love. The Lord hears our prayer, **thanks be to God**

We pray for the poor, the unemployed, the homeless and the weary. The Lord hears our prayer, **thanks be to God**

We pray for all who needs God's strength today, including ourselves. The Lord hears our prayer, **thanks be to God**

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are
yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

The Offering & prayer

Gracious God, we offer to you all that we have and all that we are. Our giving to the church, either by standing order or other means; our giving to charities supporting causes close to our hearts; our acts of service and compassion to others. All these we bring to you, and ask your blessing on us and those about whom we care. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

THE DISMISSAL

StF 340 – Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim

- 1. Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim, and publish abroad his wonderful name; the name all victorious of Jesus extol; his kingdom is glorious, and rules over all.**
- 2. God ruleth on high, almighty to save; and still he is nigh, his presence we have; the great congregation his triumph shall sing, ascribing salvation to Jesus our King.**
- 3. 'Salvation to God who sits on the throne! Let all cry aloud, and honour the Son; the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim, fall down on their faces, and worship the Lamb.**
- 4. Then let us adore, and give him his right; all glory and power, all wisdom and might, all honour and blessing, with angels above, and thanks never-ceasing, and infinite love.**

Prayer & blessing

Send us out, O God,
to travel towards Pentecost.
Waiting for your Spirit,
we look for signs of your life.
Restore us, support us,
strengthen us, establish us,
this week and in the weeks to come. **Amen.**

Christ our King,
make us faithful and strong to do his will
that we may reign with him in glory;
and may almighty God bless us,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**