

A SERVICE FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

(the Sunday after Ascension Day)

24th May 2020

The Gathering

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen.

The Greeting

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you

All and also with you.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

All He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Welcome and Introduction

Prayer of Preparation

All Almighty God,

to whom all hearts are open, all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:

cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Prayers of Penitence

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Invitation to Confession

What God has prepared for those who love him,
he has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything.
Therefore, let us in penitence open our hearts to the Lord,
who has prepared good things for those who love him.

All **Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us,
forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you
in newness of life to the glory of your name.
Amen.**

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from all our sins,
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness, and keep us in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Gloria in Excelsis

All **Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

The Collect

Collect for the Seventh Sunday of Easter

O God the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ
with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven:
we beseech you, leave us not comfortless,
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us
and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now
and for ever.

All **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word

The First Reading: Acts 1.6-14 (*The Ascension of Jesus is described*)

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But 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.” ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They 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.”

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³ When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

This is the word of the Lord.

All **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 68.1-10 and 32-35 (*a Psalm of Praise and Thanksgiving*)

¹ Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered; let those who hate him flee before him.

² As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire,
let the wicked perish before God.

³ But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy.

⁴ Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds
— his name is the LORD — be exultant before him.

⁵ Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

⁶ God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
but the rebellious live in a parched land.

⁷ O God, when you went out before your people,
when you marched through the wilderness,

⁸ the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai,
at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

⁹ Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad;
you restored your heritage when it languished;

¹⁰ your flock found a dwelling in it;
in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.

³² Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord,

³³ O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens;

listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.

³⁴ Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel; and whose power is in the skies.

³⁵ Awesome is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel;

he gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!

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.**

The Second Reading: 1 Peter 4.12-14 and 5.6-11

(Peter offers encouragement to the faithful suffering)

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

⁶ Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord.

All **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Reading

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

All **Alleluia.**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

All **Glory to you, O Lord.**

17 After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶ “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸ for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon

I must start by admitting that I found today’s readings to be something of a ragbag when I read through them to see what I might usefully say about them. First, you have the description of the Ascension from Acts, presumably to make sure that anyone who only worships on Sundays doesn’t miss out on the Ascension – one of the central Christian occasions – just because Ascension Day always is on a Thursday. Incidentally, did you know that the readings from Acts are compulsory for all main church services throughout the Easter season and that there are hardly any Old Testament readings in the Lectionary for this time? This is a tradition that goes back over a thousand years, possibly as early as the fourth century and is meant to complement the way that, in Lent, we look back repeatedly to the Old Testament prophets, but then in Easter season we look forward and instead have readings about the early church from Acts.

Having heard of the Ascension, we then moved to the sufferings of the early church in our second reading and Peter’s words of encouragement. I’m going to circle back to this later for reasons I hope will become clear.

Finally, today’s Gospel reading is part of Jesus’s long and complex prayer which closes his farewell address¹ to the disciples just before his arrest and crucifixion. There is a

¹ A long central section of John’s gospel, comprising chapters 13 to 17

wealth of theology that one can get from this part of John's gospel, but I don't propose to drag you through such an exercise just now. What I will pick out from it is that Jesus refers to his followers – that is, us – many times in the passage, but only prays for one thing for us and that is the Father's *protection*. This is where, I think, our second reading ties together not just the two other readings but links to the wider situation we find ourselves in at the moment.

Whenever a major global incident – like the coronavirus pandemic – comes along, it's usually only a matter of time before certain phrases get repeated so often they become clichés. There are several we keep hearing at the moment in the media, but two that I find especially interesting are the idea that we are finding 'a new normal' and that 'after this, everything has to change'. The 'new normal', which for us expresses how we find ourselves unable to do everything we would like to, including attend church services, functions wonderfully as a description of how the disciples must have felt at the close of our first reading. They have witnessed the Ascension and return to Jerusalem, and are presumably wondering what on Earth they're supposed to do next. They found themselves having to adjust to 'a new normal'. And did you notice what they did? They constantly devoted themselves to prayer². They may only have had an inkling of it, but they too could have said to themselves, quite rightly, 'after this, everything has to change'.

And so we return to our second reading, where Peter offers words of encouragement to the suffering. Now, for once, I don't think there are many people in the world who wouldn't say that they are suffering in at least some ways at the moment. Whether it's the life-changing suffering of serious mental or physical illness, or the relatively lower-level suffering of having your freedom curtailed and being unable to be with those we love, there is possibly a greater number of suffering people in the world now than there were in our previous 'old normal'. Did you notice how Peter instructs his audience to discipline themselves³, rather like the Government has required us to discipline ourselves in terms of going out and so on over the past few weeks? And you might think that Peter's advice to us is perhaps a little more comforting than the Government's has been: cast all your anxieties on God, because he cares for you⁴. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you⁵. With Jesus's prayer to the Father for his protection over us, I hope this adds up to more than just a platitude of reassurance or cliché of comfort at this disconcerting and unpleasant time we find ourselves in:

Cast all your anxieties on God, and he will protect, restore and strengthen you.

² Acts 1:14

³ 1Peter 5:8

⁴ 1Peter 5:7

⁵ 1Peter 5:10

The Creed

All We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As we continue to celebrate your glorious Ascension and look to the coming of your Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we pray:

Risen, ascended Lord,
as we rejoice at your triumph,
fill your Church on earth with power and compassion,
that all who are estranged by sin may find forgiveness and know your peace,
to the glory of God the Father.

Lord, in your mercy

All hear our prayer.

As our country and our world continues to struggle against coronavirus,
we pray for those who are ill or suffering,
those who care for them,
those who are afraid or vulnerable,
and all those who provide us with essential services of any kind:

Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious, be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus.

Lord, in your mercy

All **hear our prayer.**

Within our own community, we pray for the sick: especially Jonathan Petty,
Mick Maton, Patricia Edward Jones, Pat Coldrick, David Stevenson, Mary Edward
Jones and George Royle.

Years Mind:

25/05/2019 Jean Farthing

30/05/2018 Felicity Walker

**In the Devizes Deanery Wave of Prayer, we pray for the people and ministers
of the parishes of:** Bishops Cannings and Etchilhampton, All Cannings, Chirton
and Patney, Marden, Wilsford and Urchfont with Stert.

We also pray for all pupils, staff and governors of the schools in our Deanery and
in our country as a whole.

Within Churches Together, Devizes: Saint James', Southbroom and for being
good stewards of the Environment and the use of eco-congregation resources.

Within our Parish: All voluntary organisations, those who are mourning,
especially Fran and her family, and for our Rector Paul, for his continued recovery.

Merciful Father,

All **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Dismissal

Blessing

The Spirit of truth lead us into all truth,
give us grace to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
and strengthen us to proclaim the word and works of God;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always.

All **Amen.**

Go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia.

All **Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.**