

*Sunday in Ascension-tide*

**ALL AUTHORITY**

INVOCATION

+ In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Christ has ascended on high.

He reigns for ever. Alleluia!

PRAISE

Thanks and praise to you,  
Jesus Christ, Lord of all,  
given the name above every other name:  
Jesus, Lord of all,  
we worship and adore you.

King of righteousness, King of peace,  
enthroned at the right hand of Majesty on high:  
Jesus, Lord of all,  
we worship and adore you.

Great high priest,  
living for ever to intercede for us:  
Jesus, Lord of all,  
we worship and adore you.

Source of our salvation, you bring us to glory  
through your death and resurrection:  
Jesus, Lord of all,  
we worship and adore you.

Every knee bows to you;  
every tongue confesses, you are Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.  
Alleluia! Amen!

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

*In your own words ask God to be with you in this time of prayer...*

*Then take a few moments to reflect on your life in the last few days, and in your own words speak to God about it, asking him to amend what is wrong, and to affirm what is good.*

*Then say:*

Holy God,  
holy and strong,  
holy and immortal,  
have mercy on me.

## PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Risen, ascended Lord,  
to you all knees shall bow:  
as we rejoice in your triumph,  
send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us,  
filling your Church on earth with power and compassion,  
to proclaim your glory to the world;  
for you are our God for ever and ever.  
Amen.

## READINGS

*Read: ACTS 1.6 - 14*

*Throughout the Bible the cloud symbolises the presence of God, and, just as Daniel saw 'one coming with the clouds of heaven', so at the end of his earthly ministry, the disciples see Jesus taken back into the cloud from which he came - a symbolic way of saying he is one with God*

*Verses from PSALM 68*

*A triumphant hymn of thanks to God. Some of its images, e.g. 'father of the orphan', 'defender of the poor' are taken up in the liturgy of Pentecost*

- 2 Let God arise; let his foes be scattered.  
Let those who hate him flee from his presence.
- 3 As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; like wax that melts before the fire, so the wicked shall perish at the presence of God.
- 4 But the just shall rejoice at the presence of God; they shall exult with glad rejoicing.
- 5 O sing to God; make music to his name. Extol the One who rides on the clouds. The LORD is his name; exult at his presence.
- 6 Father of orphans, defender of widows: such is God in his holy place.
- 7 God gives the desolate a home to dwell in; he leads the prisoners forth into prosperity, but rebels must dwell in a parched land.
- 8 O God, when you went forth before your people, when you marched out across the desert, the earth trembled, heavens poured down rain: at the face of God, the God of Sinai, at the face of God, the God of Israel.
- 10 You poured down, O God, a generous rain;  
when your people languished, you restored their inheritance.
- 11 It was there that your flock began to dwell. In your goodness, O God, you provided for the poor.

16 You, mountain of Bashan, are a mighty mountain; a many-peaked mountain, the mountain of Bashan. It is there that the LORD shall dwell forever.

19 You have ascended on high; leading captivity captive ...  
They see your solemn procession, O God, to the holy place: the singers in the forefront, the musicians coming last; between them, maidens sounding their timbrels.

29 Summon forth your might, O God, which you have shown us. From your temple high in Jerusalem, kings will come to you bringing their tribute.

33 You kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, praise the LORD who rides on the heavens. ... Come, acknowledge the power of God.

35 His glory is on Israel; his might is in the skies. Awesome is God in his holy place. He is God, the God of Israel. He himself gives strength and power to his people.  
Blessed be God!

*(Adapted from the Grail version. 'Prisoners' in v. 7 refers to those in the bondage of debt.)*

*Read: JOHN 17.1 – 11.*



## REFLECTION

High above the Octagon in Ely Cathedral is a fourteenth century carving by John of Burwell of Christ in Majesty, his hand raised in blessing. There is another carving with the same subject over the Prior's Door, and also a modern statue by Peter Ball above the pulpit. The painting in the ceiling above the labyrinth at the west end depicts the same theme, as does the final panel in the nave ceiling, and there is a picture of Jesus enthroned in glory at the top of several stained glass windows. Wherever you look in the Cathedral a strong statement is being made about the eternal significance of Jesus of Nazareth. He is enthroned in majesty, the one to whom all authority is given, in heaven and on earth. As we enter the Church, as we gather around the Lord's table, as we listen to Lord's word, we are reminded who has the ultimate authority in this place and also in the world.

The sculptures, paintings and windows that adorn the cathedral illustrate beautifully the fulfilment of Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper: 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all you have given him.' (*John 17.1-2*) Jesus is the One to whom all authority has been given, and the Bible illustrates this in wonderful images. John of Patmos in the Book of Revelation writes of Christ walking among the seven lampstands... clothed with gold, eyes like flame, feet like burnished bronze; and in the Book of Daniel in the account of his vision of the court of heaven sees One like a Son of Man coming before the Ancient of Days to whom was given 'dominion and glory and kingship, that all people and nations should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.' (*Daniel 7.14*) When we celebrate the ascension of Jesus, we celebrate the fulfilment of this prophecy. But we celebrate

more than that. More deeply, we celebrate the fulfilment of God's purpose of love, to bring us home to him and to raise us also to the heavens – in Jesus' words: to enjoy eternal life.

In the *Acts of the Apostles*, Luke describes the exaltation of Jesus in picture language, and it is important not to let the picture obscure the deeper truth to which it points, as tourists to Jerusalem are invited to do. Near the summit of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem there is a small building called the Mosque of the Ascension. It used to be a church, and inside it is a stone slab with two impressions in it that look like footprints. This, your guide might tell you, is the place from which Jesus ascended into heaven – the divine footprint somehow being impressed into the stone – and the credulous might believe him. The whole thing is a fabrication, but alas the faith of some people has not got beyond that literal level. So when reading St Luke's account we have to remind ourselves that the story of the ascension is not giving us spatial information. Its truth is not about where Jesus went (where indeed could it be?), nor from where, but about his eternal significance. Luke says Jesus was lifted up into a cloud. The cloud is the Biblical symbol of God's glory, for example the pillar of cloud that went before the Israelites in the wilderness, and the voice which spoke from the cloud at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. This is the Biblical way of saying God was there there. And now Jesus is received into the cloud itself: this is the Biblical way of saying he becomes one with the God and shares God's authority.

The Dominican friar, Geoffrey Preston, put it this way: 'When we celebrate the Ascension we are not so much remembering the last time Jesus took leave of his disciples, perhaps in some rather spectacular way. Rather we are trying to realise and to celebrate the way Jesus now is.\* It's the way Jesus now is which the decoration of the cathedral celebrates: Jesus is the exalted One who now reigns in glory.'

By giving him authority God makes Jesus' life is the standard by which we all shall be judged. He is the Lord before whom the indifferent and those who reject him will have to appear, just like those who believe. His justice is the standard by which all human institutions and policies will be judged – and that is the point that Christians who campaign for social justice, for a fairer distribution of the world's resources, for effective action on climate change, are making. Christ is the King, and all our plans and policies, our ethics, and our economics, must be brought into line with his values.

Geoffrey Preston puts it well: 'The "Yes" God gave to Jesus in raising him from the grave resounds in the Ascension. Jesus has received ... "all authority". His life, focussed and summarised in his death, is now authoritative for all times and all places. It sets the pattern and forms the God-given model for the lives of people at all times and in all places. That pattern of living, and only that, has any final value as a way of being human.'

Christians celebrate this day with thanksgiving because all this is visible only to the eyes of faith. The fact that Jesus is exalted, receiving as his own all authority in earth and heaven, is not the kind of fact which is open to casual observation. It is only clear to those who believe in him. Or rather, believing in him enables us to see things as they eternally are. The world proceeds as though the final standard is human judgment. But we know differently. Faith enables us to know now what, in the end, will be apparent to all: that Jesus is the One upon whom the Father's favour eternally rests; his is the only Name by which we shall be saved.

Christ is the King! O friends rejoice! Amen. Alleluia!

*Pause and reflect.*

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\* (Geoffrey Preston OP, *Hallowing the Time*, p.142.)

PRAISE

Christ is the King! O friends, rejoice;  
brothers and sisters, with one voice  
Let the world know he is your choice.  
Alleluia!

Oh magnify the Lord, and raise  
Anthems of joy and holy praise  
For Christ's brave saints of ancient days.  
Alleluia!

They with a faith forever new  
Followed the King, and round him drew  
Thousands of faithful servants true.  
Alleluia!

O Christian women, Christian men,  
All the world over, seek again  
The way disciples followed then.  
Alleluia!

Christ through all ages is the same:  
Place the same hope in his great name,  
With the same faith his word proclaim.  
Alleluia!

Let love's unconquerable might  
Your scattered companies unite  
In service to the Lord of light.  
Alleluia!

So shall God's will on earth be done,  
New lamps be lit, new tasks begun,  
And the whole church at last be one.  
Alleluia!



PRAYERS

Jesus, our exalted Lord,  
all authority has been given to you;  
Lord, let my prayer be joined with yours.  
*Lord, hear my prayer.*

Jesus Christ, great high priest,  
living for ever to intercede for us:  
pray for the Church, your broken body in the world ...  
*Lord, hear my prayer.*

Jesus Christ, king of righteousness,  
enthroned at the right hand of the majesty on high:  
pray for the world, that it may be subject to your just and  
gentle rule ...  
*Lord, hear my prayer.*

Jesus Christ, Son of Man,  
drawing humanity into the life of God:  
pray for your brothers and sisters in need, distress or  
sorrow ...  
*Lord, hear my prayer.*

Jesus Christ, source of our salvation,  
bringing us to glory through your death and resurrection:  
surround with your saints and angels  
those who have died trusting your promises ...  
*Lord, hear my prayer.*

Jesus Christ, Lord over all things,  
ascended far above the heavens and filling the universe:  
pray for us who receive the gifts you give us for work in  
your service ...  
*Lord, hear my prayer.*

Jesus Christ,  
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit  
and in the bond of peace,  
and bring the whole created order to worship at your feet;  
for you are our God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

## CONCLUSION

Our Father...

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