



Opening Scripture - Acts 1:8-11a

[Jesus said,] "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."

As the disciples were watching, Jesus was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?"

Call to Worship

Today is Ascension Sunday when we celebrate Christ's return to God.

We look up in wonder as he is lifted from us into heaven!

But this is not a time to gaze upward. We have work to do.

Jesus has entrusted the ministry of God's love to us.

Let's make our hearts ready for the task ahead with prayer and praise!

Hymn: StF 300 (*Charles Wesley, 1707-1788*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mC06U0apiK8>

1. Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia!
to his throne beyond the skies. Alleluia!
Christ, the Lamb for sinners given, Alleluia!
enters now the highest heaven. Alleluia!

2. There for him high triumph waits; Alleluia!
lift your heads, eternal gates. Alleluia!
He has conquered death and sin; Alleluia!
take the King of glory in. Alleluia!

3. Highest heaven its Lord receives; Alleluia!
yet he loves the earth he leaves. Alleluia!

Though returning to his throne, Alleluia!
still he calls us all his own. Alleluia!

4. Still for us he intercedes; Alleluia!
his atoning death he pleads, Alleluia!
near himself prepares our place, Alleluia!
he the firstfruits of our race. Alleluia!

5. There we shall with you remain, Alleluia!
partners of your endless reign, Alleluia!
see you with unclouded view, Alleluia!
find our heaven of heavens in you. Alleluia!

Prayer

Almighty God, We thank you for the wonder of Ascension, that marvelous yet mysterious moment in the life of the Apostles which left them gazing heavenwards in confusion yet departing in joy. We thank you for the way that it brought the earthly ministry of Jesus to a fitting conclusion, signifying his oneness with you, and demonstrating your final seal of approval on all that he had done. We thank you that, through his Ascension, Jesus is now set free to be Lord of all: no longer bound to a particular place or time, but with us always - able to reach even to the ends of the earth.

We come now to make our confession. Forgiving and gracious God, you have called us to be your witnesses. Forgive us when we are too impatient to wait for your power to fill us. Forgive us for being self-centered and failing to look around us at the world in need. Forgive us for failing to be your hands and feet in the world. Help us to be open always to your word and your love. Challenge us to move in directions of peace and hope for all people. In the name of Christ, our risen & ascended Savior, we pray. Amen.

Scripture

Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:1-11

Reflection

Luke gives us two accounts of the ascension: one at the end of his gospel and the other in the opening chapter of Acts. In both accounts, the disciples are told that they will receive the power of the Holy Spirit and that once they do, then they are to be his witnesses and preach repentance and forgiveness, to all nations and the ends of the earth.

When Jesus ascends to heaven, the disciples are faced with an in-between time as they prayerfully wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, so that they have the power for what comes next. They have no idea how long the waiting will be. Can you imagine what those 10 days were like? We too experience in-between times of uncertainty or expectation when we want to turn the page to the next chapter, but we have to wait; awaiting the results of medical tests, waiting for a child to be born, waiting for a cast to be removed etc. We are all waiting right now for COVID restrictions to be lifted and to be able to sing again in church. *How do we pause and wait well?*

In our Acts reading, two men (angels?) ask the disciples 'Why are you looking up towards heaven?' We are called to go from the place where we gaze into the clouds to the places where the world needs Christ. We are sent to be witnesses. Worship is an important part of our faith, but our behaviour and actions at other times are important too. *Who do you know who needs some hope, love and light?*

Many artists who have portrayed the Ascension in paintings have pictured Jesus' feet disappearing into the clouds and have also painted footprints on the ground, not far from where the disciples are standing gazing upwards with their mouths open. This has me pondering the places where Christ walked while he was on the earth, and the places that we are being called to walk now as we become Christ's feet. Jesus walked among the poor, the outcast and the sick, and among the children, women and foreigners. *Where are you walking?*

Luke's gospel account concludes with a blessing. Christ was in the act of blessing them as he left them. Just because they could no longer see Christ, did not mean that he had stopped blessing them. Take comfort and strength in Christ's blessing for you.

Prayer

Almighty God, we pray for the power of your Holy Spirit to empower us. Give us patience to wait for your Spirit, rather than operating under our own power. Fill us and use us to share your hope, love and light with our families, friends, neighbours and communities. May we draw strength from above, as we look back down and around us at those in need. Be with us as we walk among your people and open our eyes to those who are suffering and what we individually and as a church community can do to help build the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. *We lift up now the concerns for others that we have on our hearts. ...* In the name of the ascended Christ, we pray the prayer that he taught us: *Our Father ...*

Hymn: StF 407 (*Keith Getty & Stuart Townend*)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YSycGm5yXjo>

Hear the call of the kingdom, lift your eyes to the King;
let his song rise within you as a fragrant offering,
of how God, rich in mercy, came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.

*King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.*

Hear the call of the Kingdom to be children of light,
with the mercy of heaven, the humility of Christ.
walking justly before him, loving all that is right
that the life of Christ may shine through Him.

Hear the call of the Kingdom to reach out to the lost,
with the Father's compassion in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness, and a hope yet to come;
let the nations put their trust in him.

Blessing

Go from here to embody the good news and fill the world with light.
And may God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be with us all, now and always. Amen.