



Hymn: StF 317 At the Name of Jesus Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6AHbO29Ipg&t=13s>

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious, when from death he passed.

Bore it up triumphant with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures to the central height;

to the eternal Godhead, to the Father's throne,
filled it with the glory of his triumph won.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true;
crown him as your Captain in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you in its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus shall return again,
with his Father's glory, with his angel train;
for all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,
And our hearts confess Him King of glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel

Prayers : Today is the Sunday after Ascension Day and so we begin with two prayers rooted in that theme and that Bible story. They are taken from the Discipleship Ministries website of the United Methodist Church in America.

O God of earth and sky, as Jesus came among us in Bethlehem to raise us up to heaven, so today we recall his departing from us at Jerusalem to be in all places. Though he is hidden from our sight, enable us to abide in him by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, until his mercy and grace fill your whole creation. Amen.

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O God, you have glorified our victorious Savior with a triumphant resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven, where he sits at your right hand.

Grant, we ask you, that his triumphs and glories may ever shine in our eyes to make us see more clearly through his sufferings, and more courageously endure our own; being assured by his example, that if we endeavour to live and die like him, for the cause of your love in ourselves and others, you will raise our dead bodies again, and conforming them to his glorious body, call us above the clouds, and give us possession of your everlasting kingdom. Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

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(Both prayers are from 'The Daily Office: A Book of Hours for Daily Prayer (Volume Three: The Great Fifty Days)')

Hymn: SoF 2805 God, the Uncreated One Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEy-yJdt6MU>

God the Uncreated One
The author of salvation
Who wrote the laws of space and time
And fashioned worlds to His design
The One whom angel hosts revere
Hung the stars like chandeliers
Numbered every grain of sand
Knows the heart of every man
He is King forever
He is King forever
He is King forevermore

God our fortress and our strength
The rock on which we can depend
Matchless in His majesty
His power and authority
Unshaken by the schemes of man
Never-changing, Great I Am
Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall
He is faithful through it all

Crown Him King forever
Crown Him King forever
Crown Him King forevermore
Oh, forevermore

Mighty God in mortal flesh
Forsaken by a traitor's kiss
The curse of sin and centuries
Did pierce the lowly Prince of Peace
Oh, lifted high, the sinless man
Crucified, the spotless Lamb
Buried by the sons of man
He was rescued by the Father's hand
To reign as King forever
Reign as King forever
Reign as King forevermore

King Eternal, God of grace
We crown You with the highest praise
Heaven shouts and saints adore

You're holy, holy, holy Lord!
What joy in everlasting life
All is love and faith is sight
Justice rolls and praises rise
At the name of Jesus Christ
King of kings forever

King of kings forever
King of kings forevermore
He is King of kings forever
King of kings forever
King of kings forevermore

Songwriters: Peter James / Aaron Keyes God, The Uncreated One (King Forevermore) lyrics © Thankyou Music, Thank You Music Ltd., Thankyou Music Ltd, Common Hymnal Publishing, 10000 Fathers, Nightlight Music, Getty Music Hymns And Songs

Reading: Acts 18 v. 1-4 and 18-28

Message: In the Gospels, Jesus is recorded as saying what might sound like a strange thing concerning ourselves and John the Baptist. He pays tribute to John, calling him the greatest man born of woman, but then goes on to say that any Christian, even the least person in God's kingdom, is greater than John. That saying both awes me and slightly confuses me as to everything it might mean. I do think, though, that one of the key differences looks forward to next week and our celebration of the Holy Spirit.

We live this side of the first Day of Pentecost. John lived the other. John lived and died before Jesus died for our sins on the cross. John lived and died before God raised Jesus from the dead pointing us to that day when we, too, will be raised to glory. John died before the Ascension, when Jesus ascended to the Heavenly realms as King of Kings and Lord of All. And John died before the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on all those who believe. That's not to diminish John – Jesus called him the greatest person up to that point – yet we live knowing that we are given so much, including the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are going to look at that in a bit more detail as we look at our reading and in it we meet three of the major minor characters in the New Testament.

Apollos – One of those names you hear in the supporting cast of New Testament characters. You probably remember enough to know that he's not one of the apostles and also that he might be quite important. It is in these verses that we first meet Apollos. He is described in a few short phrases. He is eloquent. He is a learned man. He has a thorough knowledge of the scriptures. He spoke boldly and with great fervour. He taught about Jesus accurately. That's how Luke, the writer of Acts describes him.

If it isn't from these verses that you remember him, it may be that the name Apollos rings a bell from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. There, Apollos is described as watering the seed that Paul had planted. He builds upon the foundations that Paul has established there. He helps the Corinthian church to grow and develop. And, he was also seen as a bit of a hero there. We know that because of what Paul has to write to the Corinthians about their splitting into factions. Some, he says, follow Paul. Some Cephas, the Aramaic name for Peter. Some follow Christ. While others, he says, follow Apollos. That's quite some illustrious company to find your name attached to. Someone has compared it to the Mount Rushmore site in America that bears the faces of those presidents seen at the time as being the greatest of presidents. Apollos, like one of those presidents, is highlighted here for all posterity, alongside Paul, Peter and Jesus.

But our reading isn't really about Apollos nor is it about Paul. It's Priscilla and Aquilla that occupy the passage from beginning to end. They are there when Paul first arrives in Corinth. He forms a natural friendship with them and Luke suggests a large part of that is occupational. Both Paul and Aquila are tentmakers. Paul takes up their invitation of accommodation and stays with them, presumably for the entire time he is in Corinth. Then, Paul moves on to Syria via Ephesus and Priscilla and Aquila journey with him, at least as far as Ephesus where they stop off and we know, from Paul's subsequent letter, that they found a church there that is meeting in their home.

So, they are quite possibly co-founders of the church in Corinth; they are definitely leaders in the church of Ephesus and, by the time Paul writes his letter to the Christians in Rome, they are there too. Paul sends them a greeting which also tells us a lot about the esteem in which he held them. He describes them as 'his co-workers in Christ Jesus who have risked their lives for him'. Paul says that not only he but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. You can see why I described both Apollos and Priscilla and Aquila as 'major' minor characters within the New Testament story. We saw in our reading the link between Priscilla and Aquila and Apollos. It was they who took him under their wing in Ephesus; they who mentored him, completed his Christian education and paved the way for him to travel on to Corinth from where, of course, they had just come. The reading also hints at a key difference between them, at least at the outset, and it's a something we spoke about earlier. Apollos knew nothing about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Verse 25 – 'He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.'

Apollos knew only the baptism of John. To understand what that means we need to peek into the following chapter. Apollos exits stage left to go to Corinth. Soon afterwards, Paul returns stage right.

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. (Acts 19)

This very much follows on from what John himself had said that he would baptise with water to show that the person being baptised had repented of their sins and was set upon living a Godly life, but Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit. These people encountered by Paul, like Apollos, had only received the baptism associated with John the Baptist. When Paul prayed for them they received the Holy Spirit and the power that came with it. That presumably is what Priscilla and Aquila were able to do for Apollos when it says that they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Have we had that way of God explained to us adequately enough? Do we see the Christian life as being like the Baptism of John – asking forgiveness for our sins and then trying to live as good a life as possible? Or do we know the power; the peace; the assurance of the Holy Spirit of God living in us and working through us. Mark Twain is credited with the quote, 'It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog'. I'm sure the Holy Spirit wasn't what was on Mark Twain's mind when he said those words but it works well as an illustration. You might see yourself as one of the smallest, puniest, weakest dogs out there. Yet with the Holy Spirit inside us, we are more than champions. The Holy Spirit is the fight God places inside you. It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog.

As we have said, in a week's time it is Pentecost Sunday and just over a week ago it was Aldersgate Day. Aldersgate Day falls on 24th May and it looks back to 1738 and the conversion experienced by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, in a religious meeting in London's Aldersgate Street. Before that date he could be said to have been living under the Baptism of John. He was trying his best to live a good Christian life without a huge amount of success or happiness. After that point he was a changed man and, with that fight and power within him, brought a huge amount of change both to individual lives and to British society. Indeed it has been claimed, with some justification, that if it hadn't been for Methodism, England could well have suffered a revolution as they did in France.

The presence of the Holy Spirit indwelling us. The fight and the power. Apollos came to know it in his life. John Wesley came to know it in his. As Pentecost approaches as a reminder to us, do you need to know it in your life? Are you the dog that feels itself inadequate when you look at the fight ahead? Remember, it's not the size of the dog in the fight but the size of the fight in the dog.

Hymn: StF 370 Breathe of me, Breath of God Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afJqt09ujyg>

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love the way you love,
and do what you would do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God;
fulfil my heart's desire,
until this earthly part of me
glows with your heavenly fire.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with yours,
to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
so shall I never die,
but live with you the perfect life
for all eternity. Edwin Hatch

Prayers of Intercession : *A paraphrase by Dean G. Blevins of John Wesley's Wednesday morning prayer for families*

Dear God, who is blessed forever, we thank and praise You for the good things of this life, and our hope for everlasting salvation in the life to come. We hope to have a vibrant sense of Your love always in our hearts. We pray this love compels us to love You, obey You, trust You, and to remain content in the way You love us, and even rejoice in the middle of the troubles that come our way in this life.

You gave Your own Son for us all. With Jesus now by Your side, will You not also freely give us the things we need? We depend on You especially for the gift of Your Holy Spirit. May we constantly feel the Spirit's presence by the strength of our holy faith. May the Holy Spirit keep us above all of those temptations that attack us, and keep us free from the stain of worldly influences. May we hold close to You in righteousness, humility, a pure heart, and with our entire minds set upon Christ.

Let Your mighty power enable us to fulfil our duty to You, and toward all humanity, with compassion, diligence, zeal, and perseverance to the end of our lives. Help us to be humble and gentle in our conversations, wise and discrete in our daily

activities. Help us be attentive to Your fatherly providence in everything that happens to us. May we be thankful for Your gifts, patient when You correct us, and always receptive for every good word and work. Help us to remember that You are always present and intimately aware of our lives; and aware of Your inestimable love in Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus we remember Your many promises and our great responsibility to account for our lives when He appears. Let this memory help us constantly to be unwavering and resolute, to be generous in our work for the Lord, and to know our labour will not be in vain when done in Christ.

Please deliver us from the cares that come from this world, from foolish desires, from vain hopes and senseless fears. Set our hearts so that even the thought of death will not disturb us, that we welcome the possibility of dying with a smiling face, regardless of when and how death occurs. We pray our hearts will be so firmly grounded in grace that nothing scares us or shakes our dependability. Instead, may we choose to die rather than dishonour Jesus who died for us! We give up our lives to Your wisdom and goodness, particularly since You know what is best for us. We believe You will never let us be tempted beyond our ability and will provide an escape so we can bear up under them (1 Corinthians 10:13)

We recommend to You all of humanity, especially the Church. We particularly recommend the country and community we live in, hoping all will believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and earnestly seek to do work. Bless our leaders, and all those who work in public service, so whatever they do may be for Your glory and the public good. Guide us, good Lord, and govern us by the same Spirit, so we might be united to You in this world, and not divided when You call us to You. May we enter Your Glory together, dwelling with You in love and joy that will never die. We pray this through Jesus Christ, our blessed Lord and saviour, who taught us that when we pray, we say:

“Our Father, Which art in heaven, Hallowed Be Your Name, Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done
On Earth as it is in Heaven, Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us, And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, For Yours is the Kingdom, power, and glory forever, Amen”

Hymn: StF 564 O Thou who camest from above Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ6pmSEzJ5A>

O thou who camest from above
the pure celestial fire to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart!

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work, and speak, and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me —

There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete.

Postscript: SoF 2756 Build Your Kingdom Here Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-4bEbK1m_c

Come set Your rule and reign, In our hearts again
Increase in us we pray, Unveil why we're made
Come set our hearts ablaze with hope
Like wildfire in our very souls
Holy Spirit come invade us now
We are Your church, We need Your power in us

Build Your kingdom here, Let the darkness fear
Show Your mighty hand, Heal our streets and land
Set Your church on fire, Win this nation back
Change the atmosphere, Build Your kingdom here we pray

We seek Your kingdom first
We hunger and we thirst
Refuse to waste our lives
For You're our joy and prize
To see the captives' hearts released
The hurt the sick the poor at peace
We lay down our lives for heaven's cause
We are Your church
We pray revive this earth

Unleash Your kingdom's pow'r
Reaching the near and far
No force of hell can stop
Your beauty changing hearts
You made us for much more than this
Awake the kingdom seed in us
Fill us with the strength and love of Christ
We are Your church, We are the hope on earth

Build Your kingdom here,