



Service for the Sunday after Ascension Day, 24th May 2020

A warm welcome to all who share in worship with us today.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Glory to God in the highest. Glory, glory, glory.

Glory to God the Father. Glory, glory, glory.

Glory to Jesus the Son. Glory, glory, glory.

Glory to the Holy Spirit. Glory to God in the highest.

HYMN: We give immortal praise

If you would like to sing this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.

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| 1. We give immortal praise
to God the Father's love,
for all our comforts here,
and better hopes above;
he sent his own eternal Son
to die for sins that we had done | 3. To God the Spirit's name,
immortal worship give,
whose new-creating power
makes the dead sinner live;
his work completes the great design,
and fills the world with joy divine. |
| 2. To God the Son belongs
immortal glory too,
who bought us with his blood
from everlasting woe;
and now he lives, and now he reigns,
and sees the fruit of all his pains. | 4. Almighty God, in thee
be endless honours done,
the undivided Three,
and the mysterious One;
where reason fails, with all her powers,
there faith prevails, and love adores. |

Isaac Watts

PRAYERS

When our actions are not loving, and we think of just ourselves –
your name is not glorified. Forgive us, God of Glory.

When our words bring hurt to others and we do not even notice –
your name is not glorified. Forgive us, God of Glory.

When the way we live is selfish and we find no time for you –
your name is not glorified. Forgive us, God of Glory.

When we do not see you or reveal your love –
your name is not glorified. Forgive us, God of Glory.

Forgive and renew us, and let your glory be seen in our lives.

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.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy 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 who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

READING – John 17: 1-11 (NEB)

After these words Jesus looked up to heaven and said: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee. For thou hast made him sovereign over all mankind, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him. This is eternal life: to know thee who alone art truly God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

'I have glorified thee on earth by completing the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world began.

'I have made thy name known to the men whom thou didst give me out of the world. They were thine, thou gavest them to me, and they have obeyed thy command. Now they know that all thy gifts have come to me from thee; for I have taught them all that I learned from thee, and they have received it: they know with certainty that I came from thee; they have had faith to believe that thou didst send me.

'I pray for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom thou hast given me, because they belong to thee. All that is mine is thine, and what is thine is mine; and through them has my glory shone.

'I am to stay no longer in the world, but they are still in the world, and I am on my way to thee. Holy Father, protect by the power of thy name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are one.'

ADDRESS

We find in our gospel reading that Jesus is preparing the disciples for a moving on, both of Jesus, who would go from their sight and for the disciples, who would have to go on without him. Jesus prepares for this next stage by praying. The passage is John's record of the great high priestly prayer of Jesus on the night before he died. Following a long conversation with his disciples, encouraging them to face what was before them all and reassuring them as to his continuing presence with them, Jesus now turns to the Father. This prayer reveals someone aware that the

critical moment has arrived, the moment towards which his whole ministry has been moving. Spoken at the culmination of his earthly ministry, these words point definitively to his risen and ascended glory. Their familiarity should not deafen us to their significance. Jesus prays for himself, for his disciples and for all believers. The first five verses affirm Jesus' own glorification through the completion of the work his Father has given him to do. Turning to those given to him by the Father, he prays specifically for their protection, protection from division, "that they may be one" as he and the Father are one. It's humbling to reflect that as he faced an agonising death, Jesus prayed for the oneness not of his physical body, but of his body the Church. We need to see ourselves in this line of followers for whom Jesus offers prayer and to respond to its urging.

Here Jesus' earthly ministry will soon be over. John portrays him as tying up loose ends. In this long Last Supper passage Jesus has spent time reassuring and encouraging the disciples. Now he is at the moment of moving on. But this situation is not actually the end – it includes the task of handing over.

What can we learn from the way that Jesus does this? Passing on the baton to his followers comes after several years of teaching, training and ministry. The disciples and others have had the chance to explore their calling, develop and practise new skills, make mistakes and learn from Jesus. Now he's preparing to let go and hand over.

Training those who'll take over means reassuring and encouraging them. Here it includes celebrating Jesus' successful ministry. He's looking beyond the cross, to his glorious rising and ascension. Jesus doesn't display false modesty but celebrates success, knowing he's done what God had called him to do.

Jesus also prays for his disciples. He asks God to protect them so that they'll remain united. He anticipates what may happen when he's no longer there to act as a physical and tangible linchpin for the group.

Are we sensitive to the fact that we might need to pass on the work to others? We must affirm the vision but not give lots of instructions about how something should be done. **LET GO!** An athlete running in a relay race who refuses to let go of the baton would look very silly.

It's tempting, just as the disciples did, to keep looking in the wrong direction. In a church on the Mount of Olives is a stone with an indented vague foot shape. Visitors are told that it's Jesus' footprint left from the ascension. Maybe this illustrates the human tendency to cling to what's knowable. A stone is tangible, possibly proof that something happened. It's easier to contemplate than the baffling story of a risen man "taken up" and hidden by a cloud and what that might mean. The men in white robes challenged the disciples to look elsewhere for Jesus. They couldn't hang on to him by staring at the sky: they had to take a leap into the next chapter of the story.

The disciples returned to where they were staying and prayed together. They knew they were to carry on the work. Jesus had talked about the coming of the Holy Spirit, but they were not sure what to do and there is no obvious sign that the Holy Spirit is with them. So they seek God in prayer. What do we do when we're stumped or uncertain?

The disciples stayed together and prayed together. Seeking the support and help of others is crucial, particularly in following Jesus. When we take on the baton, it's important to ask for help and support. Jesus' followers put their trust in God. They'd been witnesses to the life-changing

reality seen in Jesus, that love not dogma is the demonstration of a good and Godly life. Because of this they were willing to trust. Even though the end of the race might be obscured, it was one worth taking part in.

Even facing the horror and suffering which the next few hours would bring, Jesus could still speak of his joy, that deep serenity which none could take away. He prayed the same joy for his disciples in all the tribulations they would face, the joy of knowing his truth and proclaiming it in a hostile world. The only ground of lasting joy is in such unity and glory as Jesus shared with the Father.

He prayed the same for his future church of which we're part. He prayed joy for us in the glory of obedient service, even though we suffer for it. And he prayed that all his Christians might be one, in a unity of love which transcends all differences, which demonstrates his reconciling power and proves the Gospel works. We've started on that journey in the URC, but there's still a long way to go. When that prayer will be answered we don't know, but we need to pray as Jesus prayed for his closest friends, never doubting that they would carry on. Jesus had taught them all he knew and he strives to teach us the same. The mustard seed was sown, the leaven was working.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

We bring before God our concerns for our world:
here there is war we pray for peace;
where there is sickness we pray for health;
where there is despair we pray for hope.
Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

We pray that you would be active in health care:
in the work of doctors and dentists, psychiatrists and psychologists, nurses and administrators,
pharmacists and researchers.
Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Guide our activity in the church: may we find ways to grow; may we always honour you;
may we serve our communities.
Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

We hold in your love those whom we love: those who are sick; those who are sorrowful;
those who need guidance and direction.
Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Come to us, God of glory. Hear us, heal us and shine through our lives.
Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Amen.

HYMN

If you would like to sing this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment

1. Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour,
glorious first born from the dead,
You alone our strong defender,
lifting up Your people's head.
Alleluia, alleluia,
Jesus, true and living Bread!
2. Prince of life, for us now living,
by Your body souls are healed;
Prince of Peace, Your pardon giving,
by Your blood our peace is sealed.
Alleluia, alleluia,
Word of God in flesh revealed.
3. Pascal Lamb! Your offering , finished
once for all when You were slain,
in its fulness undiminished
shall for evermore remain,
Alleluia, alleluia,
cleansing souls from every stain.
4. Great High Priest of our profession,
through the veil You entered in,
by Your mighty intercession
grace and mercy there to win,
Alleluia, alleluia,
only sacrifice for sin.
5. Life-imparting heavenly Manna,
stricken Rock with streaming side,
heaven and earth with loud hosanna
worship You, the Lamb who died,
Alleluia, alleluia,
risen, ascended glorified!

George Hugh Bourne

BLESSING

Go into the world to show God's glory, and may you always know God's blessing and God's peace.

Amen.