

Ascension Day 2020

David Treharne (DT) 1. Welcome

It is Thursday 21 May. It's 40 days since Easter Sunday, and the joy of remembering the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Today is Ascension Day!

Roger Martin sings: Hail the Day verses 1 & 2

DT 2

Hello and welcome to those of you who have tuned in today. If you are from outside the Parishes of Tidenham, ST B & H here in this beautiful corner of Gloucestershire, then thank you for joining. My name is David Treharne.

You've just been listening to (and hopefully joining in with) Roger singing some of the wonderful Ascension Day hymn 'Hail the Day that sees him rise.'

The important feast of Ascension Day has always been special to me. When I was in school it was a half day so that was good.

As a chorister for many years in the Parish choir at Llandaff Cathedral every Ascension Day we used to walk up the steps to the tower (147 steps???) and sing Hail the Day that sees him rise at 6 o'clock in the morning.

That early morning ascent up the tower... was to help us all remember something about the ascension... Jesus ascending to the Father to reign in glory, his earthly work complete.

This feast day 40 days after Easter has remained part of my spiritual discipline since my youth... and in each parish I've been to there has been early morning rise to celebrate the feast of the ascension. Sadly, we're only gathering online today... but we are still managing an 8am Zoom breakfast gathering on this really important feast day!

Anyway, let's hear about the ASCENSION.

Fiona: Luke 24:44-end

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,

⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you

what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

The Ascension of Jesus

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then

they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

DT 3

Ascension Day is not marked far and wide as it once was but it's still a core & key part of our faith.

Indeed it's mentioned in the Apostles Creed... *"He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father."*

I suppose Ascension might be compared to closing ceremony of the Olympic Games or the Graduation ceremony for a student... in that all the work of Jesus' earthly life and ministry is done. Everything has been achieved and won! There is just the important conclusion... or perhaps one might say coronation of Jesus in glory.

God's work of salvation for humanity in Christ Jesus has been completed on earth. Now Jesus can return to his Father in heaven and take his place at his right hand where he will reign in glory, and importantly... intercede for us.

The book of Hebrews says that Jesus passed '*through the heavens*' (Heb 4:14) to be seated at the Father's right hand (Heb 1:3) and therefore we are now able to draw near to the throne of grace and receive mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:16).

As a result, whatever our struggles... cancer, coronavirus, isolation, sadness, anger, fear or betrayal... we can pray with confidence and seek God's help in time of need because our ascended Lord intercedes for us.

As Tim Keller writes, *"It doesn't matter what you have been or what you have done. It doesn't matter how flawed and foolish you are. When the eyes of God the Father look at you, they see the ascended Jesus; when they listen to you, they hear him. When God looks and listens to you, he sees and hears infinite beauty."*

Do not hold back in prayer. Heaven is not in lockdown... it's very open for the business of forgiveness, new life and communication with God! Indeed apparently 3 million more people are trying prayer in the UK!

Roger Martine sings verse 3&4 of Hail the Day

DT 4

When Jesus ascends to the Father he doesn't go back to the Father empty handed. He comes back with the humanity he united to himself.

God the Father lovingly sent his Son into the world. Smashing through the barriers separating humanity from God ... Jesus makes the return journey... taking humanity with him in this world and the next.

As our collects for today say...

Lord, as we believe your only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens,
so we in heart and mind may also ascend
and with him continually dwell;

Risen Christ,
you have raised our human nature to the throne of heaven:
help us to seek and serve you,
that we may join you at the Father's side,
where you reign with the Spirit in glory,

St Augustine says, *"Our Lord ascends to heaven, let our hearts ascend with him."* St Paul offers the same advice *"If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things"* (Col 3:12).

Thanks to the resurrection and ascension we can participate in Christ's resurrection life... and share in his victory and reign over the powers of sin, evil and death.

And, when our journey is over in this life, Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us... so that where he is we might be also! John 14

Ascension is the final piece of the jigsaw well almost... let's hear our reading from Acts...

Kathy Acts 1: 1-11

1 In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach **2** until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. **3** After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. **4** On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. **5** For John baptized with^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit."

6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the

earth.”⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

DT 5

On the day of the ascension, the day of his departure, Jesus tells his disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit to come, which of course happened on the day of Pentecost 10 days later. With the Holy Spirit upon them in a new way they would share the gospel in word and deed and see the extraordinary transformation of lives and extraordinary growth of the church.

We too, like those disciples, wait in these days for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that our lives may be transformed and that in turn we may in word and deed witness to the love and transforming power of God in Christ.

Jesus told his disciples that it was good for him to leave them and return to his Father in heaven because only then would the Holy Spirit come. As a man Jesus was limited to time and space. In returning to the Father and opening up heaven’s door, he releases and pours out his Holy Spirit... his unlimited presence upon the early church and the world... and empowers us to continue his work on earth.

Christians across the world will be praying for the Holy Spirit to come and for God to reign afresh in our lives, our churches, our communities, our relationships, our situations, our nation, our world.

And I invite you to join me and them each day at 7pm to join in prayer over the next 9 days in the lead up to Pentecost 2020. You can join the service Zoom or join in using the resources online.

DT 6 Responsory

As we wait in silence,

All **make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we listen to your word,

All **make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we worship you in majesty,

All **make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we long for your refreshing,

All **make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we long for your renewing,
All **make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we long for your equipping,
All **make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

As we long for your empowering,
All **make us ready for your coming Spirit.**

Roger sings verse 5 & 6 of Hail the Day

DT 7. Final blessing

May the Spirit,
who set the Church on fire upon the day of Pentecost,
bring the world alive with the love of the risen Christ.
And the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.