

God has been there!

As you come in worship today, may these words inspired by Acts 1:9-11, draw you to God.

A new day has begun. Hope wins!
A fresh start is granted. Faith wins!

Today we have the opportunity to do something new. Hope wins!
Christ is entering your life in a new way. Faith wins!

Come, to God, who is inviting you into life in a new way, a way that transcends death, a way of hope and faith. Love wins! Jesus Christ, who overcame death to give us new life!

Prayer for today

Exalted God, you are the constant lover who never forsakes me; you are the parent who cradles her children, you are the teacher patiently repeating your words for me. I worship you.

Jesus Christ, in you I am convinced God loves me; through you, I am formed into one of your people; with you, I serve those the world has forgotten. I follow you.

Holy Spirit, you are the power that gives me peace; you are the wisdom that reveals the broken in my midst; you are the spokesperson to whom I am deaf. I welcome you.

God in Community, Holy in One, I lift my prayer to you as Jesus taught, saying,
Our Father... Amen



We Stood There, Speechless For A Moment

A meditation – as if the apostle James were talking to you today about his experience that day Jesus ascended to heaven.

We stood there, speechless for a moment, struck dumb by the enormity of it all, for he was gone, plucked away from before our very eyes and, quite simply, we were lost for words, stunned into silence.

It wasn't the first time, you see; we'd lost him once already - watched in horror as he was nailed to a cross, sealed in a tomb, and we'd been devastated, convinced we could never bounce back from such a blow.

We wouldn't have, either, not by ourselves, but suddenly he was back, there in the garden, there on the roadside, there in the upper room our Lord, alive, risen, victorious, death unable to hold him!

I just can't tell you how wonderful that was, how our hearts skipped and our spirits soared each time we saw him.

¹⁴ They agreed they were in this for good, completely together in prayer, the women included. Also Jesus' mother, Mary, and his brothers.

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**God knows because God has been there.**

I wonder if you realised that Thursday just past was Ascension Day, the 40th day after Easter day. Our reading text is taken from Luke's writing in the Book of Acts where he recounts the story of the risen Lord's departure from his disciples. The Ascension is probably not the best known of the feast days on the calendar, but it is one that takes on increasing depth and importance the more you think about it and experience it.

The Ascension of Jesus is not a device to get him back into heaven from whence he came. The Ascension is an account of how Jesus, having finished his work on earth, blazes a trail over which we one day shall travel, a trail to eternal life that continues our relationship with the risen Jesus and God, our creator and redeemer.

The first thing to get clear about the Ascension is that it is about God. It is not about the physical location of heaven. It is about God. Even though it comes toward the end of Eastertide, the Ascension is most closely related, in meaning, to Christmas. At Christmas we celebrate the Incarnation, God becoming flesh and living among us. The divine become human. What we say today is that what was begun at Christmas is brought full circle, and proclaimed again in a different way, at the Ascension.

At the Incarnation, at Christmas, what it means to be God became fully a part of what it means to be a human being. In Jesus, the human and the divine become united in the person and life of Christ. That's Christmas. At the Ascension, this human being-the person and the resurrected body of Jesus-became for all eternity a part of who God is. The life of a single, individual human being is forever joined to the life of God the Father, the one who created the heavens and the earth.

It is important to remember that it was not the spirit of Jesus, or the essence of Jesus, that ascended to the Father. It was the resurrected body of Jesus: a body that the disciples had touched, a body that ate and drank with them, a real, physical, but gloriously restored body-bearing the marks of nails and a spear. This is what ascended. This is what, now and forever, is a living, participating part of God. The Ascension changed who God is.

It is important to really think about that event, think about what it says about being human. Sometimes those of us who are involved with the life of the church are uncertain about the value of our humanity. We have a (sometimes deserved) reputation for being uncomfortable or even embarrassed about much that characterizes being human-things like the reality of our bodies and our appetites, the fact that we are finite, and limited; the fact of our mortality and the certainty of our death; the painful difficulty we have in relationships; the struggles, joys, and setbacks that always seem to be a part of our quest for God; and the power that our feelings and emotions have over us. All of these parts of being human, and so many others, we frequently treat as less than holy, as somehow divorced from our spiritual and religious lives, even as bad things we should not have.

The Ascension, along with the Incarnation, is here to tell us that it is a good thing to be a human being; indeed it is a wonderful and an important and a holy thing to be a human being. It is such an important thing that God did it. Even more, the fullness of God now includes what it means to be a human being. The experience, the reality, and the stuff of being a person is so valuable that God has

made it a part of God's life.

This is not to say that everything about us as people is wonderful and holy; and we can certainly not imagine that everything we human beings do is wonderful and holy. But it is very clear that in the eyes of God it is a wonderful and a holy thing to be a human being. This is one reason we should treat ourselves, and one another, with care and with great respect. The Ascension, the fact that God has brought into himself one who is fully human, this can remind us that simply being a human being is a sacred thing, never to be abused or taken lightly.

Another thing the Ascension means is that God knows what it is like to be a human being because, and there seems to be no better way of expressing it, God remembers what it is like to be a person.

When we approach God, when we consider God, and when we try to share our lives with God, it is important to remember that we are dealing with one who remembers -- and who does not just know abstractly what our lives are like. God remembers what it is like to hurt and to laugh, to pray and to hunger, to be lost and afraid, to celebrate and to mourn; God remembers what it is like to live and what it is like to die. God knows this, and God knows this in the only way that really matters as far as relationship is concerned. God knows because God has been there.

So we are able to approach God, to reach out to God and to look for the presence and will of God, with confidence and with joy. For as we turn toward God, we are not only dealing with the creator of the universe and the ruler of all time and of eternity; we are also drawing near to the one who lived our life and who has shared our fate. We are coming near to one who knows us and who cares. We are coming home.

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A Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you were brought low, yet you have been lifted high. You were the servant of all, yet you are above all and beyond all. You were despised and rejected, yet your name is exalted above all names. You were fully human, yet you are divine. You were taken into heaven, yet you are here by our sides. You are higher than our highest thoughts, greater than our minds can ever grasp. So, with all your people in every age, we bow before you and confess you as our risen Saviour, the King of kings and Lord of lords, to the glory of God the Father.

Lord, I pray now for my neighbours – the people living nearest to me right now. I may not know the details of their situation but I believe that You do and so I lift them before You now.

Lord, I pray for my congregation and for neighbouring congregations in the Presbytery. Bless all those who minister, in whatever capacity. Send Your Spirit, I pray, to revive and renew your Church, especially in these difficult days.

Lord, I pray for my community – the community You've called me to live and to serve within. I bring before You those who are suffering and struggling, those who are lost and lonely, those who see no light at the end of the tunnel.

Lord, I pray for our nation – for those who are in positions of responsibility and authority. Guide them and grant them wisdom that their leading might be according to Your will and always with the greater good in mind. I pray for our world – in all its brokenness and pain, placing before you the disease present in our world and I turn to you in our time of need. Bring wisdom to doctors. Give

understanding to scientists. Endow caregivers with compassion and generosity. Bring healing to those who are ill. Protect those who are most at risk. Give comfort to those who have lost a loved one. Welcome those who have died into your eternal home. Stabilize our communities. Unite us in our compassion. Remove all fear from our hearts. Fill us with confidence in your care as I commit myself to work for the coming of Your Kingdom, Lord Jesus. Amen.

A contemporary hymn, written by Graham Kendrick;

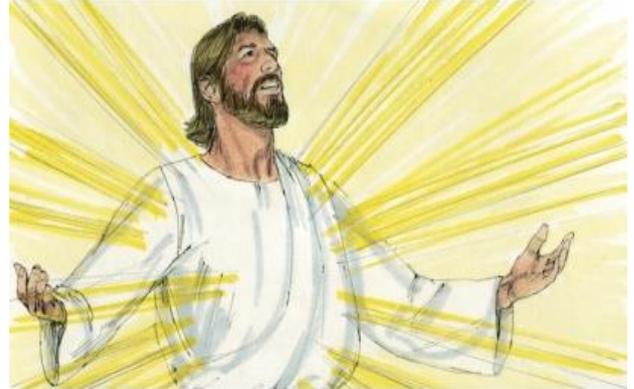
Lord, the light of Your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth You now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me.

*Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the
Father's glory*

Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire

Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy

Send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be light



Lord, I come to Your awesome presence
From the shadows into Your radiance
By the blood, I may enter Your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me.

Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory

Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire

Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy

Send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be light

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here, may our lives tell Your story
Shine on me, shine on me.

Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory

Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire

Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy

Send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be light

A Blessing

As you go remember this: Your God reigns! He is robed with majesty and armed with strength. His kingdom is from everlasting to everlasting. He holds our world and our lives securely. So do not be afraid, but go with confidence, knowing that the God who goes with you is greater and more powerful than anything else you will face this week.

With the blessing of God, father, Son and Holy Spirit resting on you and giving you his peace. Amen.