

## Worship 17 May

Welcome to this worship on the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the season of Easter. It means that in a few days' time is the feast of the Ascension. Ascension never falls on a Sunday - it is celebrated 40 days after Easter - and it is not a feast day that we give much attention to in our church. For if we celebrate the Ascension, we are celebrating Jesus leaving us. And who wants to celebrate that? Who wants to celebrate being left alone? Who wants to celebrate that Jesus commanded the disciples to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"—and then immediately left them to do it on their own? So no wonder we do not care much about Ascension. We already know too well the pain of goodbyes, loss and loneliness? Why would we want to celebrate Christ leaving us too? But perhaps Ascension is not so much about Jesus leaving us but rather finding him everywhere on earth, if we only stop looking up but rather look around us.

Hymn            For the beauty of the earth

Prayer

Lord, you are everywhere to be found

Your Spirit is active in all the world

We see you in the beauty and creative forces of the earth

We hear you in conversations of family and friends face to face or online, or on the telephone

We discern your voice in honest debates and arguments that reveal truth

You are present in laboratory, in hospital,

in virtual class and lecture rooms  
Your presence is found in research and all human  
thoughtfulness  
Wherever neighbours offer help,  
wherever volunteers reach out to care for those in need,  
you are there  
You are there when we love, forgive, weep and laugh  
Spirit of God, you move within and among us  
Give us an awareness of your presence,  
sensitivity to respond to your promptings,  
honesty to judge our actions and change our ways when  
necessary so that we proclaim you in word and deed,  
making visible your grace and love in all that we say and  
do.  
Amen.

Reading            Acts 1: 1-11

### Reflection

Do you know that the two most prominent Biblical scenes painted in the Middle Ages were the virgin birth and the ascension of Jesus? Why these two scenes? Because they frame Jesus' earthly life – his arrival in the world and his departure. And throughout history, Christians have continued to look into the sky – awaiting Jesus' return. But why look up? Are we not to look elsewhere for Jesus? And here I will quote my favourite preacher and writer Barbara Brown Taylor in *Gospel Medicine*: “*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?*” *That is what the two men in white robes said to the disciples on the mount called Olivet just outside of Jerusalem. Luke calls them men in white*

*robes...but you can bet they were angels – angels sent to remind God’s friends that if they wanted to see him again, it was no use looking up. Better they should look around instead, at each other, at the world, at the ordinary people in their ordinary lives, because that was where they were most likely to find him – not the way they used to know him, but the new way, not in his own body but in their bodies, the risen, the ascended Lord who was no longer anywhere on earth so that he could be everywhere instead. No one standing around watching them that day could have guessed what an astounding thing happened when they all stopped looking into the sky and looked at each other instead. On the surface, it was not a great moment: 11 abandoned disciples with nothing to show for all their following. But in the days and years to come it would become very apparent what had happened to them. With nothing but a promise and prayer, those 11 people consented to become the church, and nothing was ever the same again, beginning with them....The disciples became apostles, witnesses of the risen Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit, and nothing was ever the same again. That probably was not the way they would have planned it.....He went away – he was taken away – and they stood looking up toward heaven. Then they stopped looking up toward heaven, looked at each other instead, and got on with the business of being the church. And once they did that, surprising things began to happen. They began to say things that sounded like him [Jesus], and they began to do things they had never seen anyone but him do before. They became brave and capable and wise. Whenever two or three of them got together it was*

*always as if there was someone else in the room with them whom they could not see – the strong abiding presence of the absent one.....”*

The ascension has made Jesus present to us in ways we never dreamed of, if we only look around us and when we see Christ among us and in each other. And if you still doubt, remember we were not left without a promise, that of the presence of the Spirit to guide and empower us and whose coming we will celebrate at Pentecost. Thanks be to God!

Prayer

O Lord our God,

as we sit in quietness our thoughts are far from quiet

We are wrestling with doubts and fears

We are looking for answers

We are holding on to hope

We are seeking strength

We are yearning for health and healing

We are praying for peace and justice

Fill us with your breath of life

Fill us with thankful hearts

Fill us with calmness, courage and, most of all,

with the knowledge of your presence

And now, we lift up to you the prayers that are in our hearts...

(Silence)

We pray that you will surround all who are ill, who are lonely, who are struggling and in despair with your loving and healing presence

And we pray for all who bring your loving and healing presence in the words they speak and work they do.....

Help us all to take to heart the words of Teresa of Avila:  
“Christ has no body now on earth but yours  
No hands but yours, no feet but yours  
Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ’s  
compassion to the world  
Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing  
good  
Yours are the hands with which He is to bless everyone  
now”

And we pray together...Our Father

Hymn            I the Lord of sea and sky

Blessing  
Go in peace and love...  
With Christ’s name on your lips  
The wisdom of the Holy Spirit in your mind  
God’s love in your hearts