

Swaythling Parish

Sunday 16 May 2021

Sunday after Ascension

Welcome

Below is a service sheet for you to use at home. You can also find our Sunday morning reflection on YouTube channel, available at 10am on Sunday, (and afterwards). Please search for "Swaythling Parish" on YouTube to find and view it.

If we can support you in any way at the present time, or you would just like to chat, do please get in touch: 023 8055 4231 peter.dockree@outlook.com

Introduction from Rev Peter Dockree

Welcome to our service today, however you are joining us. This Sunday is the Sunday after Ascension, and Ann will be sharing some thoughts on the Kingdom of God, reflecting on recent events.

Greeting

Grace mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you

And also with you.

The Lord be with you,

And also with you

Prayer of Thanks

Ann will share later about the kingdom of God which upends the assumptions and priorities of society. We are going to take a moment to upend our own foci by giving thanks for the things we forget, the things that go on in our lives without us noticing, the people who we are blessed to know and be known by.

Lord God we give thanks for all the good

things in our lives, those things we notice and those we rarely do. Amen

Prayer of Confession

Take a moment to own the things we have done that we wish we have not, said that we regret and thought that we should not have thought.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

May the God of love
Bring us back to himself,
Forgive us our sins,
and assure us of his eternal love
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Finally let us take time to own the hurt and pain that so often holds us back, and give it to God.

Lord God

We offer to you our wounds and our pain,
and ask that we may carry them together.

Amen

The Collect

Risen, ascended Lord,
as we rejoice at your triumph,
fill your Church on earth with power and compassion,
that all who are estranged by sin
may find forgiveness and know your peace,
to the glory of God the Father.

Hymn: 382 Jesus Christ is waiting

1. Jesus Christ is waiting,
Waiting in the streets;
No one is his neighbour,
All alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am lonely too.
Make me, friend or stranger,
Fit to wait on you
2. Jesus Christ is raging,
Raging in the streets,
Where injustice spirals
And real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry too.
In the Kingdom's causes
Let me rage with you.
3. Jesus Christ is healing,
Healing in the streets;
Curing those who suffer,
Touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity too.
Let my care be active,
Healing just like you.
4. Jesus Christ is dancing,
Dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred
He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph too.
On suspicion's graveyard
Let me dance with you.

5. Jesus Christ is calling,
Calling in the streets,
"Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet."
Listen, Lord Jesus,
Let my fears be few.
Walk one step before me;
I will follow you.

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Readings

Acts 1: 15-17, 21-26

Matthias is chosen to be one of the Twelve, in place of Judas Iscariot.

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred and twenty people) and said, 'Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus— for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.'

So one of the men who have accompanied us throughout the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.' So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. Then they prayed and said, 'Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.' And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

Luke 24: 44-53

Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

A Reflection by Ann Lewin

There has been a lot to think about this week. It was Christian Aid Week, played out against the background of the pandemic which is challenging us in many areas of our life. One aspect of our corporate life that we have become acutely aware of is the gulf between people who have sufficient resources to draw on, in some cases more than sufficient, and those who can't make ends meet: who try to live on benefits but struggle at times to feed their families or themselves. That is the situation in this country – but what about the people who have little or nothing in some of the

less well-developed parts of the world, or who are living in refugee camps?

Christian Aid has always directed its efforts to helping people in practical ways to live fuller lives: by providing education, health care, clean water and sanitation, and teaching improved methods of agriculture. None of us will have escaped the appeals coming through our letter boxes or on our screens from charity after charity, Christian Aid among them, saying that they have lost large amounts of income because their fundraising efforts have had to be cancelled.

This year, our Government has decided to cut our Aid Budget, on the grounds that we have had such a difficult year that our economy is struggling, and we need the money. When challenged, those who made the decision say that it is only a temporary measure, and in any case, the UK is in the top three countries giving money in Overseas Aid. Some of us will remember Bob Geldof saying in an earlier crisis, 'Meanwhile, Prime Minister, people are dying'. Charity begins at home, people say – but if it stays there, it becomes selfishness. We may not have been able to give anything to Christian Aid this year, with no envelopes to fill with our offering, but we can give directly through their website, and there may be a chance to join in a Quiz later – keep an eye open for details if it can be arranged.

Last Thursday was Ascension Day, a festival largely unnoticed by the world at large, but significant in the Christian Calendar. It's an event which seems rather quaint to modern eyes and ears. The people who lived at the same time as Jesus, and for many centuries after, believed in a three-tiered universe with the earth rising on pillars out of the waters beneath it, and the dome of the sky separating earth from heaven which was where God dwelt.

Our discoveries in recent years, the voyages into space, and the recent mission to Mars, leaves us feeling that the picture of Jesus 'ascending into heaven' doesn't make sense – in any case didn't Yuri Gagarin come back from the first expedition into space saying that he had found no evidence of heaven or of God? The imagery used in the account in the New Testament balances the imagery used to describe how Jesus 'came down from heaven' as the Christmas carol puts it, when he was born in Bethlehem. It's all part of the imaginative poetic language Christians have used to convey the mystery of God becoming one of us, to show us in Jesus what human life can be like when we try to live according to God's will, and of Jesus taking that humanity back with him to the fullness of God's nature when he had done his work, offering us the hope of transformation in our turn. Words fail to do that mystery justice – but we have to try.

Because of the way the calendar fell this year, Ascension Day was followed by the day on which the church remembered Matthias, the person chosen to make up the number of the Twelve to replace Judas Iscariot. The remarkable thing about Matthias is that he is *unremarkable*. He may have had an important role to play in his community outside the church, but in the company of the first Christians he didn't do anything except be part of what was going on, or if he did it wasn't recorded. And that's an encouragement to those of us who don't do anything remarkable in church life, apart from faithfully turning up to worship, keeping the body alive and witnessing to people around that God is among them.

After Jesus left them at the Ascension, the disciples might well have stood around wondering what to do next. Life was never going to be the same again.

And in that respect we know something of what they felt. As we move out of the restrictions under which we have lived for over a year, life isn't going to be the same for us either. We need to work at reshaping our lives, in the church as well as in society. Like the disciples, we have been given some guidance about what we need to consider. Jesus' parting words were to tell the disciples that they had a job to do, to tell the world the good news about him and his mission. They were promised the resource that they would need: the power of the Holy Spirit. Their job, and ours is to enable the Kingdom of God to be established.

This coming week is part of the nine days between the Ascension and Pentecost, a period which has been set aside for us to pray *Thy Kingdom Come*. They are very familiar words, part of the prayer that we use more than any other. What kind of Kingdom are we talking about? We have seen quite a lot of the pageantry which surrounds monarchy in this country recently, with the solemnity of Prince Phillip's funeral, and the recollections of the joy of Kate and William's wedding as they celebrated their tenth wedding anniversary. But the Kingdom of God has nothing to do with privilege or pageantry – it is the gathering together of relationships which promote values and practices which are good for all creation, independent of status or faith. The kingdom of God is concerned with justice and peace and the flourishing of all. The Kingdom is here in some measure wherever people work for those ends, but it won't be here in all its fullness until justice and peace and the well-being of all creatures are at the centre of all that we plan.

RS Thomas wrote a poem called *The Kingdom* which describes how different the Kingdom of God is from the way most of the world lives:

*It's a long way off, but inside it
There are quite different things going on:
Festivals at which the poor man
Is king and the consumptive is
Healed; mirrors in which the blind look
At themselves, and love looks at them
Back; and industry is for mending
The bent bones and the minds fractured
By life. It's a long way off, but to get
There takes no time, and admission
Is free, if you will purge yourself
Of desire, and present yourself with
Your need only, and the simple offering
Of your faith, green as a leaf.*

It's a kingdom which turns things upside down, and challenges assumptions about how we relate to each other. It challenges our motives too. 'Purging ourselves of desire' may sound rather like turning ourselves into rather bland, dull creatures. But it doesn't mean ceasing to be passionate about things that matter. Perhaps it points us towards the next petition in the prayer, 'Thy will be done.' Wanting to do things our way, for our benefit, might be one of the obstacles to the coming of the Kingdom. Our calling is to discover the will of God, finding out where God is at work, and opening ourselves up to allow God's Spirit to flow through us, challenging all that gets in the way of human flourishing. The need that we bring is for God's Spirit encouraging us to have faith that all things are possible with God, and that God longs for our co-operation.

As we pray 'Thy Kingdom come' this week, let's pray that God's Spirit will show us what we need to do as we struggle with global and local problems of injustice and poverty, and the needs of the planet and the animal world. Let's pray that God's Spirit will show us how the church needs to change and

develop in order to assure people in all their diversity that they are all loved by God.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people, and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be remade, and you will renew the face of the earth.

Prayers

Let us pray for our world, our community and those in need around us. You may wish to light some candles as you pray.

Thy Kingdom come, Lord in thy mercy **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we bring with us as we pray people who live where the greed and cruelty of powerful people deprive them of freedom and the chance to grow and flourish. Send your Spirit of peace into the hearts of all who oppress others, and encourage all who work for justice to be established. We pray especially for Christian Aid, and other charities which work for the common good.

Thy Kingdom come, Lord in thy mercy **hear our prayer.**

Lord, send your Spirit to us and renew your church, globally and locally. We pray for all leaders that they will exercise their authority with humility and wisdom. Help people who differ from each other in their understanding and practice of the Gospel to deal with their differences kindly, with respect for each other. May our churches be places of safety, where everyone is honoured and supported.

Thy Kingdom come, Lord in thy mercy **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate God, we pray for all who struggle with the circumstances they find themselves in: for people who have to rely on food banks for basic necessities; for all living on benefits which are not sufficient to support them; for all worried about jobs, or losing their homes; for all who are ill, in hospitals or at home, and those who care for them. Be with all who work in or alongside the NHS. We pray for all who mourn the death of loved ones. In a moment of quiet we bring to you all we carry on our hearts.....

Lord give us all the healing and strength we need, and keep us hopeful.

Thy Kingdom come, Lord in thy mercy **hear our prayer.**

We thank you, God of time and eternity, for all who have served you faithfully and encouraged us on our journey and now live in your fuller presence. Keep us faithful in our turn, so that we may come to share the joy of your eternal Kingdom.

Thy Kingdom come, **Merciful Father accept our prayers, for the sake of Jesus Christ our risen Lord and Saviour.**
Amen

Hymn: O breath of life come sweeping through us

I O Breath of life, come sweeping through us,
revive your church with life and pow'r;
O Breath of Life, come, cleanse, renew us,
and fit your church to meet this hour.

2 O Wind of God, come bend us, break us,
till humbly we confess our need;
then in your tenderness remake us,
revive, restore, for this we plead.

3 O Breath of love, come breathe within us,
renewing thought and will and heart;
come, Love of Christ, afresh to win us,
revive your church in ev'ry part.

4 O Heart of Christ, once broken for us,
'tis there we find our strength and rest;
our broken, contrite hearts now solace,
and let your waiting church be blest.

5 Revive us, Lord! Is zeal abating
while harvest fields are vast and white?
Revive us, Lord, the world is waiting,
equip your church to spread the light.

Bessie Porter Head (1920)

Closing Blessing

Thank you to everyone for worshiping with us today.

We pray that this week we may be guided by a love that is greater than fear, by a grace that is stronger than shame, by a hope that is greater than despair and by a joy that is deeper than all our pain.

May the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be among us and remain with us always. **Amen**

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