Christ Church, Oxford
House Evensong for Ascension Day
May 21st 2020
Full Script Version
Welcome and introduction

The College Chaplain, Revd Clare Hayns

Welcome to our service of House Evensong for Ascension Day. Every term we gather together as a Christ Church community and friends for a time of worship and also to eat and drink together.

This is normally in our College Chapel, the cathedral but this term our service is rather different as we can’t physically gather together. You might notice I’m currently on a balcony looking out over the beautiful Christ Church meadows.

It’s rather fitting that our service falls on Ascension Day this year, a day when we remember Jesus’ physical body was taken up into heaven – when Jesus transcended time and space to join the heavenly realms, and in doing fulfils his promises to be with us for all time.

We are delighted that the service has been put together with voices from across the college community and is sung by members of the College Choir. We are also very pleased to welcome Revd Canon Adrian Daffern, Vicar of Great St Mary, the University Church of Cambridge.

We may be separated in time and space but we are together in spirit and so let us pray as we begin:

The Collect for Ascension Day

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that 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;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

Hymn

Recorded by the choristers of Christ Church,
Pembroke and Worcester, accompanied by Sophie Biddell

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus;
His the scepter, His the throne.
Alleluia! His the triumph,
His the victory alone.
Hark! The songs of peaceful Zion
thunder like a mighty flood;
"Jesus out of ev'ry nation
has redeemed us by His blood.

Alleluia! Not as orphans
are we left in sorrow now.
Alleluia! He is near us;
faith believes, nor questions how.
Though the cloud from sight received Him
when the forty days were o'er,
shall our hearts forget His promise,
"I am with you evermore"?

W. Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)

Responses

Plainsong Preces and Responses
sung by members of College Choir from home

Minister O Lord, open thou our lips
and our mouth shall shew forth thy praise.
Minister O God, make speed to save us.
Choir O Lord, make haste to help us.
Minister Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Ghost;
Choir as it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.
Minister Praise ye the Lord.
Choir The Lord’s Name be praised.
Psalm 47
Read by voices from across the Christ Church Community

Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.
For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome,
a great king over all the earth.
He subdued peoples under us,
and nations under our feet.
He chose our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom he loves.
God has gone up with a shout,
the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.
Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
For God is the king of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm.
God is king over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.
The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
he is highly exalted.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Reading
Acts 1.1-11
Read by Louise Collinson, undergraduate

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; or John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or
periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Here ends the first reading

Magnificat
Dyson in C Minor
Sung by Brenda Anak Ganeng, accompanied by Ben Collyer

My soul doth magnify the Lord:
and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded: the lowliness of his handmaiden.
For behold, from henceforth: all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath magnified me: and holy is his Name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him:
throughout all generations.
He hath shewed strength with his arm:
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat:
and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things:
and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel:
as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.

(Luke 1: 46–55)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son:
and to the Holy Ghost;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be:
world without end. Amen.
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 worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Here ends the second reading

The Sermon

The Revd Canon Adrian Daffern
Vicar of Great St Mary’s,
The University Church of Cambridge

It’s a real joy to be with you across time and space from here in – well, am I allowed to say the ‘C’-word to all of you? – or shall we just say ‘the other place’? Well, I hope it’s not bad luck to bring you greetings from here, the University Church of St Mary the Great in Cambridge, better known in these parts as Great St Mary’s. Unlike your place, we have no cathedral here in Cambridge, neither is there any separation between the university and civic churches, so here we minister in a kind of Trinitarian formula, a Cambridge version of Christ Church, St Mary the Virgin in the High, and St Michael at the Northgate, all rolled into one. It’s a great place to be, and, like you, we’re working out afresh how to worship and witness, not in and from this building, but, as I said at the start, across time and space. Ascension Day is a good day to be talking about time and space, because the event described in our reading from Acts is all about the One who, by his resurrection and ascension, joins heaven and earth in one 1. The ascension is about Jesus’ transcending time and space by his Lordship over them.

That does not make Jesus a Time Lord. But, that does provide a nice segue for me. A few weeks ago, just before lockdown, I was at Broadcasting House in London, and found myself face to face with the TARDIS. For reasons I don’t entirely fathom, the security people wouldn’t let me go inside. So let’s pretend. Join me, if you would, in my liturgical TARDIS. The clock is set for just over 500 years ago. It’s today, Ascension Day, in 1518\(^2\), and we find ourselves materializing in, of all places, the Galilee Chapel of Durham Cathedral.

As we emerge blinking into the mixed clouds of dust and incense – rather like your Chaplain’s sitting room - we hear an extraordinary sound in the distance. It’s a mixture of liturgical chant, and gruff physical exertion. We walk into the space at the rear of the Nave, and see an amazing sight – a larger-than-life-sized papier-maché figure of Christ, zooming upwards with surprising speed from the floor of the nave into the tower. At his feet is a small group of sweaty monks in a heap, exhausted from heaving on an elaborate rope system to assist the Lord’s flight.

Mediaeval Monasticism does All-Age Worship. And it’s true – that really is what we would have seen in Durham Cathedral 500 years ago\(^3\). But if we could set our clock to 2000 years ago, in the real Galilee, or Bethany, or Jerusalem (depending on which account we read), what would we have seen there? A human rocket, as in Durham? Or something else entirely? Would we have seen the Lord of all time and all space, being carried up to heaven in glory? Would we have seen the cloud take him from our sight? Would we have seen anything at all?

I think we know that if we constrain ourselves to human understandings of time and space, we surely miss the point of this story. And while the story is, obviously, all about Him, it is, of course, just as much about us.\(^4\) Matthew and Luke have much to say in their respective gospels, but so does John in his, and one text in particular has lodged in my mind as I prepared these words. Chapters 13-17 of John are one massive, dense, emotional setting of Jesus’ last hours with his disciples.

In chapter 16, John records Jesus saying this: ‘I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away’.\(^5\)

It is to your advantage that I go away.

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\(^2\) Ascension Day in 1518 was May 13th
\(^3\) Surtees Society. *A Description or Breife Declaration of All the Ancient Monuments, Rites, and Customs Belonginge or Beinge within the Monastical Church of Durham before the Suppression : Written in 1593*. London: Nichols, 1842. Print. Publications of the Surtees Society ; v. 15.
\(^4\) It is not we who invite the Ascended Christ to share our spatio-temporality, but he who invites us to share his; cf. Begbie on Calvin in Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge 2000), 170
\(^5\) John 16.7
What does that mean for you and for me? Surely this: that without his departure, we
will not be able to receive the measure of Christ’s gift.\(^6\) Without his departure, we
will not enjoy the blessing of the Spirit.\(^7\) And without his departure, we cannot be the
agents of his mission, of his Kingdom, that is, I hope, our longing, and our goal.
‘Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads’\(^8\) wrote Thoreau. He was speaking
of the beauty of a winter landscape. But his wonderful words might apply equally
well to our task, and our calling: and it is at the heart of the meaning of the Ascension
of Christ. Not to stand gawping skywards, trying to work it all out, like the Men of
Galilee in our reading.\(^9\) No. It is to do what those first disciples did – to get on with
the job of prayer and proclamation, and to grow God’s church in holiness and truth.
Right now we cannot do that physically, but only in time and space. How good, then,
that our God transcends time and space. He is gone up. Today, he joins heaven and
earth in one.

\(^6\) Ephesians 4.7
\(^7\) Acts 1.8
\(^9\) Acts.1.11
The Anthem
Thou Wilt Keep Him in Perfect Peace
Samuel Wesley, (1810-1876)
Sung by the College Choir from home

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,
whose mind is stayed on thee.
The darkness is no darkness with thee,
but the night is as clear as the day.
The darkness and the light to thee are both alike.
God is light and with him is no darkness at all.
Oh let my soul live, and it shall praise thee,
for thine is the kingdom, the power,
and the glory, for evermore.

The Lesser Litany and Responses
Plainsong Preces and Responses
Sung by members of College Choir from home

Minister  The Lord be with you.
Choir     And with thy spirit.
Minister  Let us pray.

Choir     Lord, have mercy upon us.
Choir     Christ, have mercy upon us.
Choir     Lord, have mercy upon us.

Choir     Our Father, which art in heaven,
          hallowed be thy name;
          thy kingdom come;
          thy will be done,
in earth as it is in heaven.
          Give us this day our daily bread.
          And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive them that trespass against us.
          And lead us not into temptation;
          but deliver us from evil. Amen.
O Lord, shew thy mercy upon us.
And grant us thy salvation.
O Lord, save the Queen.
And mercifully hear us when we call upon thee.
Endue thy ministers with righteousness.
And make thy chosen people joyful.
O Lord, save thy people.
And bless thine inheritance.
Give peace in our time, O Lord.
Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.
O God, make clean our hearts within us.
And take not thy Holy Spirit from us

The Prayers

Led by the Revd Canon Graham Ward

On this day Lord, we celebrate your ascension into the glory of the Godhead. We don’t fully understand all you achieved on the cross and through the resurrection, but on this day we raise our eyes and hands to the glory of that Godhead, and praise you that all creation is redeemed and being redeemed through your love. Draw close in your exultation that we might be inspired by your Spirit to see far more than we know.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer

We give thanks, Lord, for all that you created, all that is subject to the intimate rhythms of your love, the turning of the constellations, the galaxies and the planets; the growth of plants, the fattening of cattle; the fish that swim and the birds that fly. Teach us to understand what all this means for us and for your Church; teach us to care as you care; teach us to tend as you tend.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer

We give thanks, Lord, for all those people who tend our needs, thanking you that we are increasingly seeing how our lives depend upon some of the lowliest and lowly paid of workers. Teach us how to appreciate each other more deeply; teach us to see the beauty and dignity in other peoples’ service.
and how we can serve them. Teach us, Lord, that the love that moves the stars may move in us and bring us all into a participation in your ascended glory.

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer**

As we thank you for hospital staff and care-workers, we hold up to you as in the eucharistic chalice those we know who are sick, those we know who are on the long road to recover for sickness, those who find these turbulent times disrupts their concentration and tugs at threads of insecurity. We pray for the students and staff of this College, for those who are fearful of the future. So often over these weeks we have seen our powerlessness, the limits of human ability and our own ability, but you Lord in your ascended glory hold all creation in your loving hands, imbue our bodies and minds with your redemption.

A prayer for those distressed in mind and body:

Don’t tell me about tomorrow.
Don’t give me comfort in the dawn.
Speak to me now in the thunder
As it rakes the trees, bruising leaves.
It is now I need your sealing.
It is now I need the lamp lit
And the oiled warmth of your flesh.
I can labour with not seeing.
I can labour living by touch,
But touch me now while the wind
Pummels the slates and the timbers
So the mystery can be lived.

Friends and family have died over this time, relationships have broken, anxiety has exhausted us and all those who have watched loved ones pass away. Ascended Lord, who brought us eternal life and opened the gates of heaven, time lies at your feet in all its restless changing. We bring you those who have died that the bonds that hold earth to heaven may be strengthened by your grace, your Spirit and our prayers. Breath peace on those who are bereaved; breathe hope in those who feel the ache of loss; bring moments of tranquillity and beauty to those despairing.

Lord, in your mercy

**All**

**Hear our prayer**
Thank you to everyone involved in this service, particularly to Adrian for joining us from the roof of the University Church in Cambridge, and for Alannah Jeune for all the technical support putting this service together.

Hymn

Recorded by Christ Church Cathedral Choir in 2004, under the direction of Stephen Darlington, from the CD 'Favourite Hymns from Oxford' (Griffin)

Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon his throne.  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as thy matchless king  
through all eternity.  

Crown him the virgin’s son  
The god incarnate born  
Whose arm those crimson trophies won  
Which now his brow adorn  
Fruit of the mystic rose  
Yet of that rose the stem  
The root whence mercy ever flows  
The babe of Bethlehem  

Crown him the Lord of love;  
behold his hands and side,  
rich wounds, yet visible above,  
in beauty glorified;  
no angels in the sky  
can fully bear that sight,  
but downward bends their burning eye  
at mysteries so bright.
Crown him the Lord of years,
the potentate of time,
creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.
Glassed in a sea of light,
Where everlasting waves
Reflect his throne, the Infinite!
Who lives, and loves, and saves.

Matthew Bridges (1800-1894)
and Godfrey Thring (1823-1903)
Tune: Diademata

The Dean concludes with the House Prayer and the Blessing

Almighty and everlasting God, the source of goodness and truth, hear our
prayer for those to whom you have committed the guidance of this House, for
its former and present members and for all those who work within it. Enlighten
us with your Spirit and give us grace to serve you in righteousness and rejoice
in your presence for all eternity; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  Amen.

Christ our ascended King
Pour upon you the abundance of his gifts
And bring you to sign with him in glory
The blessing of God almighty
The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
Rest upon you and remain with you wherever you may be this day
Now and always. Amen

Music after the service recorded by Ben Collyer, Christ Church Organ Scholar
Laudes by Francis Pott


Cover Image: The Rising Christ, Attributed to Bernardino Butinone, with thanks to Christ Church Picture Gallery. Photo: Ralph Williamson