Written Service Sunday May 17th 2026
A service of worship for use at home
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Ascension: Deepening our Relationship with Christ

Call to Worship:
Clap your hands for joy, all peoples!
Praise God with loud songs!
The Lord, the Most High, is to be feared;
He is a great king, ruling over all the world.
God goes up to His throne.
There are shouts of joy and blast of trumpets, as the Lord goes up.
Sing praises to God; sing praise to our king!
God is king over all the world; praise Him with songs!
God sits on His sacred throne, He rules over all nations. *(Taken from Psalm 47)*

Hymn: StF 263
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Lord, we lift up your name; with hearts full of praise;
Be exalted, O Lord my God!
Hosanna in the highest.

Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!
Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!
Lord, we lift up your name, with hearts full of praise;
Be exalted, O Lord my God!
Glory to the King of kings!

Carl Tuttle

Prayers of Adoration and Praise
Gracious God, for your love for us, gentle as a shower, healing our pain, binding our wounds
We give you our thanks.
For your love for us, sure as the dawn, transforming our darkness, revealing your truth,
We give you our thanks.
For your love for us, mercifully steadfast, calling us to you, raising us up,
We give you our thanks.
For your love for us, encouraging questions, opening doubts, making us vulnerable,
We give you our thanks.
Urge us on, O Christ, to find wholeness through serving you, by serving others, in the power of your Spirit. Amen

New Testament Reading: John 17:1-11
After Jesus finished saying this, He looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son, so that the Son may give glory to you. For you gave Him authority over all mankind, so that He might give eternal life to all those you gave Him. And eternal life to know you, the only true God, and to know Jesus Christ, whom you have sent I have shown your glory on earth; I have finished the work you gave me to do. Father! Give me the glory in your presence now, the same glory I had with you before the world was made.

I have made you known to those you have given me out of the world. They belonged to and you gave them to me. They have obeyed your word, and now they know that everything you gave me

comes from you. I gave them the message that you gave to me, and they received it; they know it is true that I came from you and they believe that you sent me.
"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those you gave me, for I belong to you. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine; and my glory is shown through them. And now I am coming to you; I am now longer in the world, but they are in the world. Holy Father! Keep them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me so that they may be one just as you and I are one.

Further New Testament Reading: Acts 1:6-14
When the apostles met together with Jesus, they asked Him, "Lord, will you at this time give the Kingdom back to Israel?
Jesus said to them, "The times and occasions are set by my Father's own authority, and it is not for you to know when they shall be. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to all the ends of the earth."
After saying this, He was taken up into heaven as they watched Him; a cloud hid Him from their sight.
They still had their eyes fixed on the sky as He went away, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them and said, "Galileans, why are you standing looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back to you in the same way that you saw Him go to heaven."

Hymn StF 264
Make way, make way, for Christ the King
in splendour arrives;
Fling wide gates and welcome
into your lives.
Make way (Make way), make way (make way)
For the King of kings (for the King of kings)
Make way (make way), make way (make way),
And let His Kingdom in.

He comes the broken to heal,
and set the prisoners free;
The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,
the blind shall see.
Make way …

And those who mourn with heavy hearts,
who weep and sigh;
With laughter, joy and royal crown
he'll beautify.
M*ake way …*

We call you now to worship him
As Lord of all,
To have no Gods before him,
Their thrones must fall.
Make way …

Graham Kendrick

Sermon:
Last Thursday, May 14th was an important day in the Christian Calendar: It was Ascension Day. Next Sunday, May 24th we will celebrate Pentecost Sunday – which is also Aldersgate Sunday. However, there will have been no service in any Methodist Church in the circuit to mark Ascension Day and perhaps only a handful in the country as a whole. However, many Anglican and RC churches think it is important enough to have a service.

Why do we ignore this day? Have we got something to learn from other churches who see this day as vital – indeed in the RC church it is a 'Holy Day of Obligation'.
I heard someone say that we ignore it because it is a weekday. Well so are Maundy Thursday and Good Friday – and Christmas Day falls midweek more often than not.
I think it is more to do with the fact that we are a bit confused by what it all means.

- Luke records a shortened version and then a longer version in Acts but he is clear that it happened in Jerusalem:
- Matthew doesn't have the Ascension but records Jesus' last words and makes it clear He is leaving:
- Mark has a shortened version but seems to imply it happens at a meal.
- And John describes how He was to go, but at the last supper He says that He will go.

However, it seems certain that the earliest disciples understood that Jesus had gone – His ministry on earth was over. The earliest New Testament writings, the letters of John, Peter and Paul all take it as fact that Jesus is now exalted in heaven – but we have to accept that the manner of His going is a mystery – one of the many questions to ask when we get to the other side!

It has been suggested that it is the most neglected festival because people don't see that it has any particular relevance; historically interesting but not important to us. However, it is important because it marks the end of Jesus' ministry; His task is over, complete. Jesus is released to a wider world, not longer confined to 1st century or to a narrow strip of land we call Palestine. This is the beginning of a whole new chapter in the relationship of Jesus with His people.

This leaving was a time of great joy for them, even though it is tinged with sadness, nothing will ever be the same. In John's Gospel, when Jesus spoke of His leaving, He impresses on His disciples that His relationship with them, and with all who follow will actually be deeper, closer than before, different. This could not happen without Him going away and the Holy Spirit coming; and they had a short time to wait for that coming at Pentecost.

However, I think it is true to say that many of us miss out on that experience of a deepening relationship with Jesus – either because we do not believe that such a relationship is possible or we do not live as though it could be true. Human relationships deepen over time, falling in love is a heady business, and there is nothing quite like the wonder of sharing your life with someone. But that relationship grows and changes, and if it is a good relationship it deepens into something much more satisfying – and we count ourselves fortunate if we find such a relationship.

Our relationship with God also deepens as we grow closer to Him:

1. That relationship can become more intimate and loving:
   We have a tendency, especially in the Protestant churches, to see God as strict and somewhat remote; waiting to pounce on us when we do wrong – pointing out our faults and making us feel guilty, until we crawl to Him in repentance and He somewhat grudgingly forgives us (and perhaps slaps us over the wrist and says 'now behave and don't do it again!') – Nothing could be further from the truth: God loves us as a father loves His children, lovingly and intimately, He even likes us!
   He takes great joy in us, He is proud of us when we succeed, and He weeps with us when we fail. He longs for our love. We can learn so much about how God feels about us from the story of the Prodigal Son. Here is a picture of a father yearning for the return of his son. The measure of the value God places on us is the fact that He was willing to become one of us and to suffer and die for us. This is no grudging love and forgiveness but is wholehearted.
   He is the person to whom we can communicate our inmost thoughts and fears and if you don't believe me, just read some of the Psalms, and He will never dismiss our thoughts with contempt or ridicule them.
   If those thoughts make us weep then He weeps with us. If those thoughts make us laugh, then He laughs with us. Do we find this a strange picture?
   Recall 'Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe' (which is an allegory) – After Aslan came back to life, playing joyfully with the two girls. More and more this is a picture of God that I love. Joy is part of the Christian life, but have you noticed that when the television news wants a Christian – especially a clergy person – to make a comment, they are usually very glum. People expect us to be straight laced, condemning and miserable. It is up to us to show that a relationship with God can be fun.
   We should not ever think of God playing hard to get! He sometimes feels remote, far away, but that is hardly surprising when our communication with Him can be so inconsistent.

Indeed it is a great wonder that He is still patiently waiting for me when I ignore Him so often .....but when I take the time, things are different.

2. Not only is our relationship loving and intimate but it can also be powerful.
   When Jesus left, He left them with a huge task to perform; nothing less than evangelising the whole world. They didn't have the abilities they needed, but Jesus promised them and they received what they needed at Pentecost. The Spirit still gives gifts. The spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament are still needed but Holy Spirit is not confined to these. In this age new gifts are needed in electronics, communications skills, business and science. Does it seem strange that God can give these gifts as well? All of them are needed if God's children are to carry out His will; He is willing and able to give such gifts if they are needed. How many of us miss out on these things because we do not realise He gives these gifts too. Or do we think we know best?

3. This intimate, loving and powerful relationship with God is made possible through Jesus, but He had to leave to release this to the world for all time and in all places. This is why Ascension is so important for us today.

4. So, why do we not have an experience of this deepening and powerful relationship? Where is the joy? I simply ask the question, how much time and care do we take in our communication with God? How much time do we spend talking to Him – even shouting at Him when things go wrong, or listening out for His answers when we have asked questions?
   We can't expect any relationship to flourish if we don't work at it. This is true on a human level and it is certainly true on a spiritual level.
   So, on Thursday, give thanks to Jesus for all He accomplished whilst on earth and even more that He left and released all this for us down through the ages.

Hymn StF 303

I know that my Redeemer lives –
what joy the blest assurance gives!
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;
He lives, my everlasting Head!

He lives, to bless me with His love;
He lives, to plead for me above:
He lives, my hungry soul to feed;
He lives, to help in time of need.

He lives, and grants me daily breath;
He lives, and I shall conquer death;
He lives, my mansion to prepare;
He lives, to lead me safely there.

He lives, all glory to His name;
He lives, my Saviour, still the same.
What joy the blest assurance gives,
I know that my redeemer lives!

Samuel Medlay

Prayer of Confession: ***(taken from 422 in Singing the Faith)***

Father, we have sinned in word and deed, and in thought,
Through ignorance, through weakness, through deliberate fault:
We've sinned against our neighbours and against you Lord,
Yet we are truly sorry and we turn to you once more.

Father of the nations, you who bless the poor.
We are servants of the endless want and drive for more.
We have made our greed a virtue, while children starve;
Come, change our joy to sorrow, 'til our lives reflect your heart.
Amen

Prayer of Intercession:
Lord, from our imperfect understanding of their suffering, we dare to stand with our brothers and sisters and to prayer with them.

We pray with children who, are still and quiet from hunger, neither laughing nor crying, neither running nor resting, know little of life but hunger and waiting. We pray with the young women, bearing and nurturing of the next generation. We pray for strength throughout the pregnancy, safety in childbirth and the joy being a channel of life and love for each precious new being.

We pray with the men who, once strong and now weakened by chronic ill-health, who struggle to go on working in the mines, factories, and on the land, made ill by the by the very conditions which they dare not leave.
(Silence)

Lord, in whose incarnation we see your deep involvement in all the complexities and greyness of living; we stand in shame who, by thoughtfulness or greed, have caused the ill-health or distress of others.
We pray with the trained healers, who, for money or status, who connive to retain the mystique of their profession, so that ordinary people never learn of their skills.
We pray for the farmers who grow destructive cash crops instead of food that people need; that your good earth may support life and not destroy it.
We pray with those involved in large firms selling useless or harmful medicines, which further impoverish those already, poor.
We often benefit from low wages paid to others. We pray for justice in international trade.
(Silence)

Lord we are glad to be associated with those who work in your healing mission. We pray with them.
We pray with the many agencies, Christian and secular, who work with individuals bringing healing; with communities encouraging self-reliance and co-operation and those who are working with governments planning health care programmes and interpreting the real needs of the silent poor.
(*Silence)*

Lord, if I had not suffered, I would not have known the Love of God.
If many people had not suffered, God's love would not have passed on.
Lord, if Jesus had not suffered, God's love would not have been made visible. Amen

Hymn StF 306
Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
Wheat the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green

In the grave they laid Him, Love who had been slain,
Thinking that He never would awake again,
Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green

Forth He came at Easter, like the risen grain,
He that for the three days in the grave had lain;
Quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in Pain,
Then your touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green

John Macleod Campell Crum

Final Prayers (said together)
Lighten our darkness, Lord we pray.
That all people may learn to deal justly,
to love mercy
and to walk humbly with you and with each other.
Amen