



Sunday 1 June 2025 – Easter 7 Ascension

Today's service has been prepared by Richard Smith,
one of our Lay Preachers

Welcome to our service this morning.

In working together on our shared mission, we commit to seven core values:

Togetherness, Humility, Curiosity, Love, Inclusiveness, Justice, Sustainability.

Justice: we hope for a better world for all and work together to be part of making that happen.

Welcome

Kia ora Faith Family, welcome to worship at Kauri Hohore this morning, the Seventh and last Sunday in the Season of Easter. Last Thursday was Ascension Day so this is the Sunday we celebrate the Ascension of Jesus to be with God. It is also the first Sunday in the week of prayer for Christian Unity, the Sunday before Pentecost. It is also Asia Sunday, when we remember where we are in this world and our many neighbours to the North. And it's the first Sunday of meteorological Winter.

*You are invited to stand if you are able,
for the hymns and the offering prayer*

The value we are focusing on today is hope for a better world for all and work together to be part of making that happen.

With all that in mind let us hope that Paul's prayer is being fulfilled in us as we engage in our life together as a church.

Paul wrote,"¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, (Ephesians 1:17)

So, hopefully this morning you will receive a topping-up of your spirit of wisdom and revelation as you share in this service of worship.

Call to Worship

Come people of God, come to worship the Lord your God, creator of all.

We come to celebrate the glory of God in sunrise each morning, the joyous singing of birds, the luscious green of trees and hills - The marvel of Life.

Come people of God, come to worship the Lord your God, shown in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

We come to remember his love and care and his commandment to love each other as he has loved us.

Come people of God, come to worship the Lord your God, shown in the presence of the Holy Spirit within us and among us.

We come to reconnect with God in prayer, to listen to his Word to us, and to share in fellowship with each other, that we may go out inspired to serve as he has commanded us; to love all whom we meet and to be his body in all we do.

Opening Prayer

Loving Lord God, we come to worship you this morning knowing you have loved us from before we were born, have continued to share your love through parents and family members and through this faith community. We give thanks to you for your gift of life to us. Open our hearts and minds to seek your word for us today and strengthen us to do your will in the weeks ahead. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus the Christ. **Amen.**

Hymn HFTC 217: [Love Divine, All Loves Excelling](#)

(Tune: Blaenwern Lyrics: C Wesley)

Centring Prayer

Love divine, we come to draw close to you, to open our hearts to you and to respond to your call to follow Jesus through this year of discernment.

As we remember the story of the ascension of Jesus, we remember also his promise to send Spirit, power, mission and purpose; calling his disciples to trust a future they could not yet see.

As we seek to follow Jesus today give us that same Spirit, power, mission and purpose and help us to hear your call to trust a future we too are yet unable to see.

Open our eyes to see where we have been blind, soften our hearts where we have been hardened, guide us to forgive where we have been hurt that we may receive your forgiveness and live lives transformed through the indwelling of your love throughout our lives. Amen.

Hymn AA 130 Teach Us, O Loving Heart of Christ

(Tune: Khandallah - Jillian Bray, Lyrics: Shirley Murray)

1. Teach us, O loving heart of Christ,
what only love can say:
"Father, forgive" and still forgive
the blindness of our way.
2. Torn is the world you came to save -
it bleeds from hands and side,
slow is your Church to bear the scars
where suffering love has died.
3. We have not healed our neighbour's hurt
nor learned our neighbour's tongue:
across the span of creed and race
your song is not yet sung.
4. We have not found your way of peace
when lack of peace is death:
we have not fed with word or bread
the hunger of the earth.
5. Christ in whose hands were thrust the nails
and yet for us could pray -
forgive the things we have not done,
the words we do not say.

Readings (*New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised*)

Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul's Prayer

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Luke 24:44-53

⁴⁴ 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.'

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ 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.'

The Ascension of Jesus

⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³ and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Acts 1:1-11

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

¹ In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴ 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; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'

The Ascension of Jesus

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' ⁷ He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ 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.' ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards 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.'

Food for Thought: Ascension - Open the Eyes of our Hearts

It's the seventh and last Sunday of the season of Easter. Next Sunday we will be celebrating Pentecost, the Church's Birthday. It's also the beginning of Winter. So, maybe, to be praying for Christian Unity this week could be envisaged as huddling together for warmth in the cold times coming, except for those in the Northern hemisphere it's the beginning of Summer and, with the warming climate,

they are fearing heat waves in their future, not our prospect of cold with wind and rain and snow.

However, this morning I want to focus on last Thursday's celebration of the Ascension of Jesus. That is why we have had three of the lectionary readings for Ascension this morning. In fact, I plan to refer to another Ascension reading shortly. Let me explain why.

We have said we are using this year to focus on discerning the way ahead for us as a faith community or church. We have taken a first step along that discernment path by reflecting on and sharing in our last News and Views discussion why each of us continue to belong in this faith community and come to share in worship together.

The next step is for each of us to ask other people why they belong to a faith community and attend worship, or why they don't. Then we need to listen carefully - not to try to persuade them to change, but to gather information. When we have heard how a range of other people view belonging and participating in church, or their reasons for not doing so, we will have some clues to help build a bigger picture of what has been going on for a generation or two now with church participation and attendance and what we need to change or do to be a more effective Church.

At our next News and Views on 27 July, we will share what we have found out from other people, to see if that can give us a steer or sense of direction on how we can engage better with a wider range of people in our community, especially some younger ones born after the Second World War.

In preparation for that step, I thought I would like to share with you some of what I have discovered when I asked some people about their belonging and participating in church and share the thinking and speculation that has stimulated for me. It will be interesting to hear what responses you received, when you asked and your reflections on them.

As we prepare to look at Ascension this morning, I want to remind you, in case you missed out, some of what we heard in our last two weeks' services as each, in their own way, set the scene for what I hope you will reflect on and mull over in the week ahead.

A couple of weeks ago Jane led our worship focussing on the value of Love and began preparing us to look forward to Pentecost. She reminded us that we have committed ourselves as a faith community to Love as the Way of Jesus.

One of our Parish's values is:

Love: we are committed to selfless love to all, including those marginalised by society and the wider church.

When Jane, led us into the prayer for centring and renewal, she began with the reminder from the prophet Ezekiel on which the Pentecost story is based; *The Lord says in **Ezekiel 36:26** : “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” (ESV)*

I would love to quote much more from that challenging service if you missed it, but I think the key comment Jane gave us in her sermon was this paragraph; *“Herein lies our challenge. Can we love like Jesus? Can we take off our positions, the masks we wear, our importance in other people’s eyes; even our “Christianese” and humble ourselves to serve others? Can we do this even knowing that those we serve might reject us, or misunderstand our intentions? Loving like Jesus will hurt.”* Yes! It cost Jesus his life and if we choose to follow him, we can expect it will require of us no lesser cost, scary and all as that may be for us.

Then last week Alan Upson, in the service he led, showed us an AI generated image of God, a very European looking grey haired old man gazing up towards the sky in devotion. Alan reminded us how our image of God shapes and limits our thinking, understanding and practice of our faith. He quoted, *“Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis explores how oppressive images of God lead us to limit and even exclude ourselves from the divine image.”* In her book ‘*She Is Love, She Is Love*,’ Lewis writes, *‘It makes sense that because white men created so much of religion, the image of God was an old white man with grey hair. However, this image needs a makeover because he’s no longer working.’* Alan continued in his sermon that, *“a light came on in my wanderings. Lewis is talking about Europeans who have shaped God’s image to justify their way of life.”* *“A God who created a world of plenty, is not the same God worshipped by Christians who live in palaces while others have to sleep in cars. Christian countries who rule that women should be paid less than men for doing the same kind of job, can’t have the same God image as those who believe that ‘To be a woman is more than enough’.”* And *“Seeing God as neither male nor female, but both, opens our eyes to the imbalance of our traditional image of God.”*

Today I invite you to reflect on what the Ascension story may tell us about our image of God and how that image, not the reality of God, may be inadequate and no longer making sense for some in our community, and possibly even for us. Paul, in his letter to the church at Ephesus comments, *“²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,”*

In his Gospel, Luke describes the Ascension as, *“⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.”*

Then in the book of Acts, Luke says, *“as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”*

Now there are heaps of things I would like to talk about with you in these readings, but I will try to focus on just one. Did you notice that each of these readings assumes the idea that the universe is Earth here and Heaven above? This is referred to as the Biblical “Three-Tiered Universe”. These readings don’t refer to what is below the Earth, but other readings do. This mental model of reality may have originally been how people imagined the reality to be, or it may have always been a metaphor. In the book of Genesis there is a story of people building a very tall tower, the Tower of Babel, so they could be like gods, another story depicting reality as a three-tiered Universe.

Certainly, since Copernicus and Galileo there has been, in the European culture, an alternative scientifically based image of reality, which is very different. Initially the church resisted the promulgation and discussion of this more modern understanding of the universe. A few years ago, the Roman Catholic Church publicly apologised for, or recanted, its persecution of Galileo and acknowledged the reality of a more modern scientific depiction of the universe.

Yet when I attended a funeral earlier this year much of what was said still reflected this three-tiered universe image. Now I’m sure most people there did not use that image thinking it was literally true, it is a common metaphor we still use, but I suspect some presume that to belong in the church you must believe the three-tiered universe is an accurate picture of reality.

When I spoke recently to one of my friends, who no longer goes to church, he gave as his reasons he no longer believed in Christianity or went to church were;

- because the church rejected science, and didn’t believe in evolution,
- It believed God gave mankind the right to have dominion over the Earth and so justified destruction, like bottom trawling and wholesale destruction of native bush,
- the unbridled growth of the human population, through forbidding contraception and abortion,
- the Church supported colonisation and the suppression of indigenous peoples,
- They rejected people who had sex before marriage, which was unrealistic and unnatural,
- They talked about a God in heaven up there, when clearly there was no such thing, as astronomers and space travel had clearly shown.

I have a very different view from his, of the teaching of the Church and the meaning of the Bible, but I don't think getting into an argument or trying to persuade him to change his mind, will help him discover the reality of a faith that is real to him.

I expect if you asked around the churches of Whangarei you would find people who thought each of those things was a core part of Christian teaching and came from the Bible. Instead, we want to encourage people to honestly explore and develop their faith. I wonder what you think?

The story of the ascension of Jesus is a picturesque way of affirming that after his death as a human being, Jesus is at one with God. But for many people in our culture the only way they have learnt to understand stories is as literally a description of what happened like a newspaper account. It is no wonder then that they reject Christianity because so much of the Bible uses metaphor to describe spiritual aspects of life.

I suspect that the image of a three-tiered universe, just like the grey-haired-old-man-in-the-sky image of God, has had its day and if we are to share our faith with a wide spectrum of this community, especially those born after the Second World War we need to ensure we are expressing our faith publicly in more readily understandable images or metaphors.

In our readings today we have Paul praying for the Ephesians that they will be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that the eyes of their hearts will be enlightened by the power of God. The evidence God could do this was that he had raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places. I understand this as Paul affirming that resurrection and ascension are God's way of endorsing the Way of Jesus.

Luke similarly uses imagery from the story of the prophet Elijah who was described as, "ascending in a whirlwind into heaven" to affirm that God was affirming the Way of Jesus.

Ascension then is not a time where we have to pretend that we believe the universe is made of three layers. Instead, as Paul promises, Ascension is a celebration that by following the Way of Jesus, God will enlighten the eyes of our hearts to love regardless of the consequences. The power of God, who is the Spirit of Love, will live in and through us as we love, like Jesus commanded us to. As this spreads through our community, this will transform this world into the Kingdom of God. My challenge to you this week is to find a way to demonstrate loving regardless of the consequences.

Let us pray then that God will open the eyes of our hearts to his indwelling love, and keep them open no matter what happens to us. Thus, enabling us to respond to the needs of others. In that selfless responding I suspect we will find our hearts strangely warmed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Community Time: Thanks, Notices & Concerns

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:

Holy and loving God, we give you thanks
for all the love we have received,
for parents and caregivers,
for extended families and communities,
for food and clothing,
fresh air and warm dry safe homes,
and for sunshine and rain.

We are indeed blessed. We celebrate the joys of life and give you thanks

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We thank you
for all those who have followed your example and forgiven us throughout our
lives,
for the good news of Jesus' call to share in your loving kingdom,
that we have the chance to belong in this faith community, to share in
worship and to grow in faith as we journey through life.

We pray for all those who have not been blessed as we have,
for those who have not felt consistently loved and cared for,
for those who are not sure of being warm, dry, safe and well fed,
for those who have not heard your good news that they are loved and
forgiven.

We pray for all those in poverty, deprivation and want

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We pray for ongoing medical support for Valerie's brother, Brian, Ann his wife,
their family and other extended family members. We pray that Brian will
experience some improvement as his medication is reduced.

We also pray for Kathryn and Viv, as Kathryn continues her recovery with ongoing
monitoring.

We pray for all those
immersed in violence whether in their minds or their homes or communities,
or in conflicts or wars,
for those trapped in addictions, greed and self-centredness and
for those who are deprived of food, water or loving company.

Move us Lord, to share the joy of the Risen Christ where and when we can, with these brothers and sisters who are made in your image, just as we are.

May we share your bounty and love, and your good news, so that they know they are loved and forgiven, as we are, and that we are all invited to belong in your kingdom of love.

Hymn HIOS 153: [Where The Light of Easter Day](#)

(Tune: Crusader - Jillian Bray Lyrics: Shirley Erena Murray)

1. Where the light of Easter Day
Shines through our life, then faith can say,
Christ is living,
Christ is moving,
Christ is changing all the world.
Here is God's good kingdom!
2. Where the yeast of love will rise,
Bubbling with God's new enterprise,
Christ is living,
Christ is moving,
Christ is working through the world.
Here is God's good kingdom!
3. Where a child can grow in trust,
Where there is joy that powers are just,
Christ is living,
Christ is moving,
Christ will colour all the world.
Here is God's good kingdom!
4. Where the harvests ripen in peace,
Where all the sounds of gunfire cease,
Christ is living,
Christ is moving,
Christ is healing in the world.
Here is God's good kingdom!
5. Where the Spirit's flame burns bright,
Where there is health and truth and light,
Christ is living,
Christ is moving,
Christ will resurrect the world.
Here is God's good kingdom!

Offering and Prayer of Dedication

Holy God you come to us in the love of parents and community,
The generosity of nature and of the farmers and growers of the world,
The compassion of healers, supporters and friends in many guises,
**Loving God bless us and our gifts of love, generosity and compassion,
of intention, time and talents, that together with all your loved children
we will do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with you. Amen.**

Hymn FFS 67: We Are Many, We Are One

(Tune: Hamilton Lyrics: Colin Gibson)

1 We are many, we are one,
and the work of Christ is done
when we learn to live in true community,
as the stars that fill the night,
as a flock of birds in flight,
as the cluster of the grapes upon the vine;
as the branches of a tree,
as the waves upon the sea,
as the cluster of the grapes upon the vine.

2 All division is made whole
when we honour every soul,
find the life of God in every you and me,
as the fingers of a hand,
as the grains that form the sand,
as the cluster of the grapes upon the vine;
as the threads upon a loom,
as a field of flowers in bloom,
as the cluster of the grapes upon the vine.

3 We will join creation's song,
make a world where all belong,
build as one in peace and loving harmony,
as the voices of a choir,
as the flames within a fire,
as the cluster of the grapes upon the vine;
as the snowflakes in the snow,
as the colours of a bow,
as the cluster of the grapes upon the vine.

Commissioning and Benediction

Go from this time of worship to do the work of Christ in this world, showing
that with respect, diversity can enrich community,
with acceptance, difference can enhance belonging,
with love, this creation can reveal God's kingdom of justice and peace.

**We go with the blessing God gives of His Holy Spirit,
to love one another fully**

**To forgive one another wholeheartedly,
to live compassionately, joyfully and abundantly.**

Sung Amen

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