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CO-OPERATING PARISH

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Sunday 17 May 2026 – Ascension

Our Service today is led by Mike Nielsen, 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.

Inclusiveness: we recognise the full equality of the entire human family to share in ministry, leadership, and worship, regardless of race, age, physical ability, neurodiversity, marital or economic status, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Mission Statement: Sharing God's love, creating hope, working for justice.

Community time during the service is a good opportunity to ask for prayers for yourself or others.

After the service you are invited to share in morning tea either in the kitchen or on the deck.

If you, or someone you know, would appreciate a visit from one of our **Pastoral Partners Team**, please speak to the service leader.

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

*You are invited to share in reading aloud the responses in **Bold Type**.*

Welcome

Call to Worship *(based on Psalms 47 and 93)*

Come all God's people! Let us gather to praise our Mighty God!
With joy we celebrate and give thanks for God's faithfulness.

Come all God's people! Let us gather to sing to our Glorious God!
With joy, and with all creation, we celebrate the powers of our King.

Come all God's people! Let us gather to worship and honour God!
**With joy we celebrate the wonderful deeds of our God and King,
and in reverent awe, we bow in worship and praise of our God. Amen.**

Source: Joan Stott – "The Timeless Psalms" RCL Psalm Year B

Opening Prayer

Creator God, you have brought us here today.
Let us join together in worship and praise of you. Amen.

Source: L3 — Liturgy, Learning, (Purposeful) Life

Hymn: [Praise with Joy the World's Creator](#) *(Tune: Lauda Anima)*

1. Praise with joy the world's creator,
God of justice, love and peace,
Source and end of human knowledge,
Force of goodness without cease.
Celebrate the Maker's glory,
Power to rescue and release.
2. Praise the Son who feeds the hungry,
Frees the captive, finds the lost,
Heals the sick, upsets religion,
Fearless both of fate and cost.
Celebrate Christ's constant presence -
Friend and Stranger, Guest and Host.

3. Praise the Spirit sent among us
Liberating truth from pride,
Forging bonds where race or gender,
Age or nation dare divide.
Celebrate the Spirit's treasure -
Foolishness none dare deride.

4. Praise the Maker, Son
and Spirit,
One God in Community,
Calling us to leave behind
Faith's ghettos and obscurity.
Thus the world shall yet believe
When shown Christ's vibrant unity.

Prayer

Exalted God,
you are the constant lover
who never forsakes us;
you are the mother
who cradles her children,
you are the teacher
patiently repeating your words for us.
We worship you.

Jesus Christ,
in you we are convinced
God loves us;
through you,
we are formed
into your people;
with you,
we serve those
the world has forgotten.
We follow you.

Holy Spirit,
you are the power
that gives us peace;
you are the wisdom
that reveals the broken
in our midst;
you are the spokesperson
to whom we are deaf.
We welcome you.

God in Community, Holy in One,
we lift our prayers to you
as Jesus taught us, saying,

Source: Thom Shuman (<https://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com>)

Lord's Prayer

*Please use whichever translation or language
you feel most comfortable with*

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever.**

Amen.

Hymn: [Celebration Song](#) (Michael Foster; Tune: Battle Hymn)

1. There's a song of Celebration that is ringing round the earth,
As humanity unites to sing of dignity and worth,
Out of poverty and anger God is bringing hope to birth:
Let all creation sing!

Chorus:

*Sing of hope and liberation; sing of justice and salvation,
Sing with holy indignation: Let all creation sing!*

2. It's a song of solidarity, of protest and of pain,
On behalf of all who suffer for another person's gain,
It's a call to faith and freedom that will never be in vain:
Let all creation sing!

Chorus:

3. It's a song that's sung in unison, but heard in harmony,
Many voices, many accents and a trillion ways to be;
And it liberates the wealthy as it sets the needy free:
Let all creation sing!

Chorus:

4. It's a song of humble penitence for all we haven't done,
It's a song of glad thanksgiving that the journey has begun;
It's the promise of a future when the world will be as one:
Let all creation sing!

Chorus:

Offering Prayer

Gracious God, for these good gifts, we give thanks. May they be used to further your work of justice in this place. Amen

Source: L3 — Liturgy, Learning, (Purposeful) Life

Community Time – Celebrations, Notices, Concerns for Prayer

Hymn: [Christ Still Rises](#) (*David Bjorlin; Tune: Hicks*)

1. Christ still rises when fear grips our city,
when death takes no pity,
when much is unknown.
Christ still rises when friends are divided,
when joy feels misguided,
when we are alone.
Christ still rises when churches are shuttered,
when praises are muttered,
when prayers go unsaid.
Christ still rises when peace has all faded,
when we are most jaded,
when faith turns to dread,
when faith turns to dread.
2. Christ still rises when we give to neighbours,
when we share our labours,
when strangers belong.
Christ still rises when we come together,
when love is our tether,
when hope is our song.
Christ still rises when grieving is ended,
when bodies are mended,
when beauty heals pain.
Christ still rises when fear has retreated,
when death is defeated
and joy will remain,
and joy will remain.

Reflection – part one

It's been quite the ride for the disciples. They'd spent the last few years following this rabbi, Jesus, witnessing amazing things and learning so much. Becoming more and more convinced that he was the Messiah, the rescuer.

Then he'd been brutally taken from them, crucified on the Cross and buried in a tomb. They'd been in mourning, tears flowing, panicked, uncertain about what would come next.

Then, early in the morning, three days later, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women came rushing to them with unexpected news – the tomb was empty!

In Luke's version of the story Jesus then appears to some of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and then shortly afterwards more of them, making it clear he really was back, in the flesh. Jesus was here, in person, sitting down to eat some of their fish.

That's where the final passages of Luke pick up with today's lectionary reading, with Jesus' parting words to his disciples – commissioning them to share the good news about forgiveness of sins to all nations – then mysteriously, he is carried up to heaven.

The Gospel of Luke doesn't say anything more than that. However, in the Acts of the Apostles – the second part of Luke's duology, two book series – Luke does describe this a little bit more, saying Jesus was lifted up and a cloud took him out of the disciples' sight.

Strange and mysterious happenings.

I mentioned at the start of the service that Ascension isn't something we tend to highlight much as a church, aside from this time once a year at the end of the season of Easter.

The focus of so much of the lectionary is on Jesus' life, crucifixion and resurrection. There's not much focus on the ascension – in fact, even in the New Testament it's only in Luke's accounts through the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts that the story is actually told. The other three gospels don't mention the Ascension in their original forms.

So Jesus is carried up and ascends into heaven – what's going on here? What does that even mean?

To modern ears it can sound absurd – Jesus just takes off into space? A month or so back Rory and I watched Project Hail Mary at the cinema – after a strong recommendation from Kim and her book club who had just gone to watch it – such an amazing sci fi movie which involves humans in space – but that's definitely not

what Luke's getting at here – Jesus hasn't become an astronaut – and it's not what early readers of this story would have thought either.

In the cosmology of the time, 'heaven' was God's space, and 'earth' was our space.

Theologian NT Wright says:

Neither Luke nor the other early Christians thought Jesus had suddenly become a primitive spaceman, heading off into orbit or beyond, so that if you searched throughout the far reaches of what we call 'space' you would eventually find him. They believed that 'heaven' and 'earth' are the two interlocking spheres of God's reality, and that the risen body of Jesus is the first (and so far the only) object which is fully at home in both.

So Jesus has gone into God's dimension of reality, into heaven.

Have you ever wondered what Jesus is up to? Now he's ascended into God's realm?

Preparing today's service gave me an opportunity to delve into that more than I have before, and via Kim I came across some fascinating thinking by a theologian called David Moffitt that I want to share with you, but first a further scripture reading from another part of the Bible that is underrepresented in our lectionary, the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 7:23-8:2

Reflection – part two

We're not sure who wrote the letter to the Hebrews, however whoever did had a good understanding of the ancient Jewish sacrificial systems set out in the Hebrew scriptures, particularly the book of Leviticus.

And as the passage we just read makes clear, that concept of sacrifice is central to the question of what Jesus is now up to in God's realm.

I was listening to a podcast this week where the host said Leviticus is probably the most neglected book of the Bible for Christians. And then, as a consequence, we don't really know how to read the letter to the Hebrews.

We'll get into that more soon, but first I wanted to introduce you to the work of David Moffitt.

He's a professor at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, with a particular interest in the ways earliest Christians understood Jesus and their own identities in relation to Jewish scriptures, practices, and beliefs.

One of his recent books is called Rethinking the Atonement. A quick definition: atonement, in theological terms, relates to God's saving work, saving humanity from

sin – literally the word derives from a term that means being at one, or in harmony, with someone. It's often used interchangeably with salvation.

Christians over the past 2000 years have had a variety of beliefs about how atonement works, how Jesus saves. A common view is that Jesus atones for us primarily (often exclusively) through his death on the cross – in that view, Jesus' crucifixion is his sole sacrifice and becomes the focus of atonement.

David Moffitt provides a counter to this through his study of Hebrews, including how the author of Hebrews, and the people reading it at the time, would have understood sacrifice through a lens of the requirements about sacrifice set out in Leviticus. His view is that when the author of Hebrews talks about sacrifice, it's not just in relation to Jesus' death, but also his resurrection and his ongoing work following his ascension. All three are part of Jesus' atoning work; all three are important for salvation.

So what makes the ascension important then? What is Jesus doing now that he has ascended into God's realm, now that he is sitting at the right hand of God?

The passage from Hebrews makes it clear that Jesus has a high priest role, mediating the relationship between God and humanity. As it says in chapter 7, verse 25 – Jesus lives to speak with God for us. It is through his ongoing intercession, his mediation, that we have complete salvation, that we are atoned, that we are fully at one with God.

The letter of First John also talks about this – in chapter one John is acknowledging that we will still sin (it didn't all disappear at the Cross) and emphasises the importance of confessing our sins. John then goes on to talk of Jesus' ongoing role as an advocate for us. And when do we need Jesus to advocate for us? When we confess our sins.

And what does Hebrews tell us about Jesus advocating for us? That he is faithful and just and that he will advocate on our behalf and that we will have our sins forgiven.

This is the importance of Jesus' ascension. Jesus is, even now, with God mediating on our behalf, from now until when he returns and we have new heavens and new earth.

Moffitt refers to this as Jesus' perpetual atoning work.

I like to think of it in three tenses: we have been saved (through Jesus' death and resurrection), we are being saved (through Jesus' ongoing mediation forgiving our sins), and we will be saved (when Jesus returns in the future to bring heaven down to earth, when he fully restores creation and sin will be no more).

We're currently in the middle of those three – we are being saved.

It's an ongoing relationship. And it's an ongoing relationship focused on Jesus now interceding on our behalf, making things right as, like we can see all around us, there is still brokenness and sin all around the world. Sin that requires confession; sin that needs forgiveness.

And that's the beauty of Jesus' ongoing atoning work... and the heart of the good news. Despite (or perhaps, because of) the sin and brokenness and despair in the world, Jesus is still there interceding on our behalf. Seeing our brokenness and sin and taking is straight to God.

Through his ascension, Jesus is now in God's realm, Jesus is mediating our relationship with God. In Moffitt's words: If Jesus was not now continuously interceding for us, then salvation is impossible.

And to elaborate on that. Our value at the front of today's service sheet is inclusiveness – to my mind I believe that's key when it comes to Jesus' ascension and ongoing work. Jesus is an intercessor not just for us, but for all of humanity, for all of creation. Jesus is mediating a complete and inclusive salvation. We all were saved, we all are being saved, and we all will be saved.

So how do we respond to this? What does it all mean?

To me this has highlighted the importance of confessing our sins.

Something I value about our church is that each Sunday we have space where we can confess our sins. Acknowledging our sin and the brokenness of the world is not something we do just because it's good for the soul, or good to get it off our chest. This is a crucial part of who we are as Christians. As followers of Jesus, we are called to bring our sins to him, who is, right now, there in God's realm mediating our relationship; advocating for us. A just and faithful high priest who is undertaking the perpetual work of atonement: bringing us, bringing all of humanity, into oneness, into harmony with God. And that ongoing work of atonement means that we can live out our mission, of sharing God's love, creating hope, and working for justice, in our communities and the wider world.

That is the importance of ascension; that is why we celebrate this day each year.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God,
we confess that we have our eyes set in the clouds
instead of on the earth You have given us.

We desire heavenly treasure
but we keep believing that worldly means will help us attain it.

Forgive us for our short sightedness.
Draw us away from the temptations
to seek worldly power and measures of success,
and call us to the down-to-earth message of Your love,
to care for the needs of those around us,
especially the oppressed and marginalised.

You have called us through scripture
to care for the widows and orphans among us;
help us to see all those who are left out by society and are in need.
Help us to break down the dividing walls that we have placed,
so that we may truly be one,
as You and Christ are one.
For it is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Source: Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, Rev-o-lution Resources

Words of Assurance

My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you don't sin. But if you do sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is God's way of dealing with our sins, not only ours but the sins of the whole world.

Hymn: [O Christ, When You Ascended](#)

(Carolyn Winfrey Gillette; Tune: Aurelia)

1. O Christ, when you ascended, you took your rightful throne;
Your time on earth had ended — yet we weren't left alone.
You reign o'er earth and heaven; your Spirit guides our way.
Your prayers uphold your people; you lead your church each day.
2. We look at earthly rulers and see what they command:
We note their years of power, the borders of their land.
Yet, Lord, you are not bounded by things like time and space;
Your reign is never-ending, you rule in every place.
3. We're tempted. Lord, to leave you in stories nicely told;
Sometimes we don't believe you and say your ways are old.
Sometimes we feel so lonely and live in doubt and fear —
But your ascension means, Lord, you're present with us here.
4. It's often quite a challenge to follow in your Way;
We're easily distracted! It's hard, Lord, to obey.
Sometimes we give you Sundays — an hour, maybe two —
But your ascension means, Lord, all life belongs to you.
5. One day, O Lord, we'll know you, as we are fully known;
One day this world of sinners will bow before your throne.
One day, God's whole creation will sing and praise your name;
On earth as now in heaven, we'll celebrate your reign.

Prayers of Intercession

Today, Jesus, we are faced with a wonderful truth to proclaim, but also, an awesome and uncomfortable responsibility. We praise you and celebrate you as Ascended Lord; we recognise that you have authority over all things, but we live in a world where greed and power and violence seem to be in control.

And so, as you call us, we pray:

Come as Lord, Jesus, and set the world to rights.

We praise you and celebrate you as the Way, Truth & Life; we recognise that in you our life is made whole and full; but we live in a world where death, brokenness and need appear to be everywhere.

And so, as you call us, we pray:

Come as Lord, Jesus, and set the world to rights.

We praise you and celebrate you as God among us; we receive your invitation to live God's dream; but we live in a world where dreams and hearts are broken daily, and hope seems all but lost.

And so, as you call us, we pray:

Come as Lord, Jesus, and set the world to rights.

Amen

Hymn: [Dare to Live the Dream God Gives You](#)

(David Bjorlin; Tune: Hyfrydol)

1. Dare to live the dream God gives you,
Seek out paths as yet unknown,
For the Spirit leads you onward,
And you never walk alone.

Refrain:

*Go in courage, walking humbly,
Bearing love none can destroy.
Doing justice, loving mercy,
Go with God, and go in joy.*

2. When the dread of doubt assails you,
And the road remains unclear,
Yet our faithful God will guide you
Through the doubt and dread of fear.

Refrain:

3. Journey on with true companions,
Joining hands and sharing bread,
For we share a common journey
And in friendship we are fed.

Refrain:

4. Dare to live the dream God gives
us,
Brave the path, and face the fear,
For the Spirit will unite us;
Christ himself is always near.

Refrain:

Commissioning

The risen and ascended Christ empowered the disciples. You leave this church
as those who are ready to speak and work for God's chosen one.

Empower us with wisdom.

Many have much to say.

Empower us to listen.

Many lag behind.

Empower us to go forward.

Many avoid the suffering of others.

Empower us to accompany those who are suffering.

Many avoid the hard decisions.

Empower us to make them.

Many ignore the poor.

Empower us to challenge inequities.

Many will not acknowledge injustice.

Empower us to seek justice.

God will empower you.

Thanks be to God.

Source: Responsive Prayers – Year A (David Sparks)

Closing karakia:

Kia tau ki a tātou katoa
Te atawhai o tō tātou Ariki, a Ihu
Karaiti
Me te aroha o te Atua
Me te whiwhingatahitanga
Ki te wairua tapu
Ake, ake, ake
Amine

Translation

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus
Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy
Spirit be with you all
Forever and ever
Amen*

Sung Amen