

Welcome & Call to Worship

God has given us everything, **God has given us new life in Christ.**

God has called us to be one in Christ, **Jesus calls upon us to love one another as God loves us.**

Come, let us worship our God, **Let us follow Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen.**

An active opening prayer

Jesus, you were born as a Baby
(*Rock baby in Arms*)

You are Loving, and Kind, and Good
(*Put up finger – one, two Three*)

You worked as a carpenter, sawing the wood
(*Saw Wood*)

In Heaven and on Earth your glory shines
(*Point up and point down, then trace big circle with your fingers stretched out*)

You died on the cross and you rose again
(*Arms out, then jump, and clap your hands*)

You are Loving, and Kind, and Good
(*Put up finger – one, two Three*)

AMEN (*roll your hands, spinning them, and shout Amen*)

Prayer of Confession: -

We are always eager to do what is good, but even when we fail, the spirit of God will help us keep God’s word, and will intercede for us when we approach the throne of Grace. Let us therefore confess our sins of Heart and mind to god:

God of Grace, We know that if your love abides in us, We will keep your commandment to love one another. We are troubled that we are not always faithful to your word; We are afraid that we will fail as bearers of your gift of peace; We are worried that we do not know you as we ought; We are anxious and hold back from embracing others in your love. Take away our fear and lead us by your spirit to the healing stream. Abide in us as you abide in Jesus, in whose name we pray.

(We pause to bring confessions of heart and mind to God)

For Christ also suffered for sins once and for all, The righteous for the unrighteous, In order too bring us to God. In the name of Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead, we are forgiven. **Amen.**

Readings:

Acts 1: 1 – 11:

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach **2** until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. **3** After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. **4** On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. **5** For John baptized with^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit.”

6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Luke 24: 44 – 53:

⁴⁴ He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Sermon

Once I was watching a show, in New York, with some friends, put on my Circ du Soilel. The amazing performers ran, and jumped and flipped and somersaulted all over the stage. One of the scenes near the end of show one of the male performers was knelt down on the stage, which was dark, with just a beaming light showering on him. As some mood music played, he pointed to the sky and seemingly float up before our eyes, and out of sight.

Of course he was a on a very small cord and he was hoisted up, but it reminded me of the scene we just heard about in our reading from Acts, where Jesus was raised above the Clouds on Ascension day, to be with Father in Heaven.

Just pause for a moment and put yourselves in this scene. Your still bewildered by the fact that Jesus died, and rose again, and now as you are talking to the resurrected Christ, angels from Heaven come among you, and Jesus rises to sit a the right hand of God.

How do you make sense of that Scene? How would you begin to explain that to someone whose never heard it before? Just as we have gotten accustomed to having Jesus around again, he is taken away from us. Gone are those revelatory post-resurrection breakfasts on the beach, the beautifully detailed scenes of Jesus’ appearing to his friends over chargrilled fish. Gone too are those profound teaching moments on the Emmaus road, as Jesus is known afresh in the breaking of the bread. I wonder, even in our bewilderment and awe of this scene, if there are things that may change our hearts of fear into minds of joy.

Maybe Jesus ascending is a sign that Jesus has fulfilled all God’s promises, so we have the tools at our disposal to share and spread Christ’s messages of Love, hope and peace to the world. Maybe if Jesus had stayed around, he would have made us feel safe and secure, but there is a danger we could have become complacent. Also Jesus promises the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christ is with us, every moment, of every day, until the end of the age.

In short our relationship with God, doesn’t depend on being able to speak to Jesus and see him. We are called to respond with Christ’s compassion and transfiguring energy, to our world of darkness and need, bringing light, hope and freedom. Jesus hasn’t just gone away. He has gone deeper into the heart of reality. He has become far more than a visible friend and companion; He has made us able to be a new

kind of human being, silently and patiently trusting God as a loving parent, actively and hopefully at work to make a difference in the world, to make the kind of difference love makes.

The friends of Jesus are called, in other words, to offer *themselves* as signs of God in the world – to live in such a way that the underlying all-pervading energy of God begins to come through them and make a difference. If we are challenged as to where God is in the world, our answer must be to ask ourselves how we can live, pray and act, to bring people to the light of Christ, Ascended to God.

Jesus is being lifted into heaven at the same moment that he is blessing the disciples. He chose to leave it to them. The same ones who were capable in one breath of inspired declarations of faith and in the next breath bumbling it so badly that Jesus calls one of them Satan. Yet, Jesus chose to trust his mission to *these* disciples—just as he chooses **us**: Jesus trusts *us* with his mission to go to the farthest ends of our communities – to proclaim Jesus, as Lord, Saviour and Redeemer. To proclaim that Jesus, the Holy Spirit, God - IS LOVE.

Luke writes a gospel sequel because Jesus is still acting and teaching. The question is not when Jesus is returning but whether we will learn to catch up to what he is doing now and to look outward instead of heavenward. **And** if we can't see how we can play a part in this continuing mission of God to the world, then Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, to empower and embolden us, to live out our calling as disciples of Christ, as Children of God.

Whatever we may be feeling from moment to moment, we've been given the gift of being in relationship with Jesus. That relationship doesn't depend on being able to see him and speak with him, because the Holy Spirit enables us to feel Jesus' presence, guiding and shaping our hearts and minds.

In relationship with God, and with the world around us, Jesus Says to us today – I have taught you all you need to know, now wait for the Holy Spirit, and when it comes GO GO GO and spread the news wherever and whenever you can.

We are the Supporting, **the vital supporting**, acts of God's Mission here in the Dorset South and West Circuit. We have to do the invitation, make worship and all we do in our churches, exciting and engaging, and we have to trust, that by God's Grace he will transform and turn peoples hearts and minds to Christ.

We must concentrate on celebrating that wonderful providence of God. In the wake of Jesus' absence, the disciples experience something unexpected. With their faces turned to the sky, the disciples see Jesus raise his hand in blessing, as the Gospel of Luke tells us. That, as he is lifted up, the reach of Jesus' blessing broadens, widening in scope from the disciples, to Jerusalem, and eventually, to the corners of the earth. It is a stunning image. For me that is the awesome Promise of the Ascension – that Jesus Lived, Died, Rose again and then took his place with God in paradise, and one day we too will join him there.

The friends of Jesus are called, in other words, to offer *themselves* as signs of God in the world – to live in such a way that the underlying all-pervading energy of God begins to come through them and make a difference. Our mission is here—to heal, to embrace, to welcome, and to love. So let's get on with that task of reaching out, of being filled with the spirit, and sharing Jesus, the Holy Spirit, God with all we meet, in his name, here across our circuit. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

The Kingdom of God is at hand – You proclaimed it, Jesus; But, it often feels like it's a million miles away.

You demonstrated its grace and showed its power, but the signs often appear faded or absent in our world. We need Your Kingdom to come, O God, in all its fullness, in all its glory; This waiting, this “now and not yet” experience of Your reign is hard and frustrating.

And so we pray for Your Kingdom to be revealed in our lives, turning our sickness and sin, our brokenness and fear into friendship and compassion, wholeness and joy. **May Your Kingdom come to us now.**

We pray for Your Kingdom to be revealed in our world, turning our war and our disparities, our consumption and our self-interest into peace and collaboration, stewardship and reverence. **May Your Kingdom come to us now.** Your Kingdom is here, and it is coming, O God. Make us faithful heralds of its message and tireless practitioners of its ways. For Jesus sake. Amen.

We now share the Lord’s Prayer

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done; On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And Lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, The power and the glory, For ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn – STF 345 - And Can it Be

1 And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour’s blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

2 ’Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
’Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
let angel minds enquire no more.

3 He left his Father’s throne above —
so free, so infinite his grace —
emptied himself of all but love,

and bled for Adam’s helpless race.
’Tis mercy all, immense and free;
for, O my God, it found out me!

4 Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray —
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

5 No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Blessing

The hour has come to go into the world, where our worship of God will continue in every moment of our lives. The hour has come to serve those around us, to shoulder the burdens of our sisters, to ease the pain of our brothers. The hour has come to glorify God, with our prayers as well as our praise, with songs as well as acts of service.

So may the blessing of God, father, Son and Holy Spirit, Rest, remain and abide with you all,
With those you love, And those you are called to love, now in the name of Christ. **Amen.**