

ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON
RESOURCES FOR PRAYER AND REFLECTION

21st May 2020

Dear Friends,

Greetings to all of you on Ascension Day. During this time of confinement we are continuing to share resources for prayer, poetry, music and reflection. This week we have received the following:

1 Prayers for Ascensiontide

Risen Christ,
you have raised our human nature to the throne of heaven:
help us to seek and serve you,
that we may join you at the Father's side,
where you reign with the Spirit in glory,
now and for ever.
Amen.

Christopher Morgan (one of the Luberon representatives on our Chaplaincy Council) has written this prayer for Ascension Day:

Dear Lord,
Upon this day the faith of the eleven Apostles was extraordinary.
Their beloved Jesus was whisked away, never again to be seen by them on earth.
Yet the Bible does not recount them floored by grief.
That was already past, the tears had been dried.
They knew what they had to do.
Spread the word of the Good News.
And if stuck for words God would enable them.
Please enable us to have such faith, even an iota.
Amen.

2 Reflections

'The ten days between Ascension and Pentecost are unique in the year. Fifty-one Sundays we proclaim Christ's presence: here we note his absence – and yet the Spirit awaited at Pentecost, has not yet come. It's a poignant in-between season, reminiscent for many of

similar in-between experiences in life, bearable and unbearable. Sailing day after day toward what he hoped – but didn't know – would be America, day after day Christopher Columbus wrote in his log, 'No land in sight: kept sailing.' That's where we are now. A long way from land. But still sailing. God give you grace to keep sailing this week.'

The Revd Dr Sam Wells

John Swinton writes:

'The other day I spoke to an elderly woman - Amanda - about the situation regarding social isolation, social distancing and the likes (she was in her doorway and I was walking past doing my 1 hour of daily exercise). She just laughed! I have been in isolation for the past ten years! People have become experts at distancing themselves from me. But now with the coming of the virus, suddenly everyone wants to help me. It's odd really.'

I felt a bit bad as I was probably one of the social distancers she was commenting on. She lived but a few hundred yards away from my house and it took a pandemic for me to notice her. It is worrying that people can be amongst us and can be so vulnerable to being lonely, isolated friendless: to not being noticed. The real tragedy was that Amanda had got used to being lonely. She was genuinely surprised when people started to pay attention to her.

Loneliness is one of the most painful experiences for human beings to go through. God creates human beings and tells us very clearly that we are made for community, that our natural state is to be in relationship: *to belong*. We *belong* to God, we *belong* to creation, we *belong* to one another.

In order to feel that we belong people need to affirm us, to notice us and to offer the gifts of time and friendship. To belong is to be loved. Amanda had had very little experience of receiving the fruits of the practices of belonging, but now when things are so radically changed suddenly people want to find out about her. That is potentially a beautiful thing. But only if it continues. There must be nothing worse than finding company in the midst of a crisis, only for it to disappear again when things get back to normal, whatever that "new normal" will look like. The revived sense of community that has emerged during this time of Covid might just be a gift that we should not lose as we move towards healthier times. Love your neighbour.'

The Revd Prof John Swinton is Professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care in the University of Aberdeen, specialising in dementia care.

3 Poetry

Commenting on his Sonnet for Ascension Day, the text of which appears below, the priest-poet Malcolm Guite writes:

In the mystery of the Ascension we reflect on the way in which, in one sense Christ 'leaves' us and is taken away into Heaven, but in another sense he is given to us and to the world in a new and more universal way. He is no longer located only in one physical space to the exclusion of all others. He is in the Heaven which is at the heart of all things now and is universally accessible to all who call upon Him. And since His humanity is taken into Heaven, our humanity belongs there too, and is in a sense already there with him. "For you have died", says St. Paul, "and your life is hidden with Christ in God". In the Ascension Christ's glory is at once revealed and concealed, and so is ours.

We saw his light break through the cloud of glory
Whilst we were rooted still in time and place
As earth became a part of Heaven's story
And heaven opened to his human face.
We saw him go and yet we were not parted
He took us with him to the heart of things
The heart that broke for all the broken-hearted
Is whole and Heaven-centred now, and sings,
Sings in the strength that rises out of weakness,
Sings through the clouds that veil him from our sight,
Whilst we ourselves become his clouds of witness
And sing the waning darkness into light,
His light in us, and ours in him concealed,
Which all creation waits to see revealed .

Ascension, from Sounding the Seasons

4 Sacred music

Sacred music for this season can be found at the following links:

Hymn – Ye watchers and ye holy ones

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mZT59b3Kaw

Anthem – God is gone up (Gerald Finzi)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_67yfaroek

5 Resources

As in each of the last five years, the Church of England is encouraging members to take part in prayer initiatives across the world in the days between Ascension and Pentecost, as part of the 'Thy Kingdom Come' initiative. Their website can be accessed here:

<https://www.thykingdomcome.global/>

6 And finally ...

An interesting statistic has emerged from the weeks of lockdown:

Before the pandemic, between 5 and 7% of the population reported attending church services, but with online provision this has increased to 24% during the current crisis. The percentage of those aged between 18 and 35 is higher, at 34%.

May the risen and ascended Christ be with us through the coming week, strengthening us in faith, hope and love.

With every blessing,

The Revd Jamie Johnston
Chaplain