

WEEK 5: SERVICE RESOURCES

THEME: THE ASCENSION

MAIN READING: Luke 24.44-53

Jesus 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." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 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." When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

SECOND READING (if needed): Acts 1.3-11

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. 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. For John baptized with[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with[b] the Holy Spirit." Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "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."

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather today to celebrate the glorious ascension of Your Son, Jesus Christ, into heaven. As we lift our hearts in worship, we ask that You open our eyes to the majesty of His exaltation.

May Your Holy Spirit inspire us to seek the things above, where Christ is seated at Your right hand. Guide our thoughts and actions to reflect His love and grace in our daily lives. Bless this service, O Lord, and draw us closer to You, that we may live in the hope and promise of our eternal home. In the name of Jesus Christ, our risen and ascended Lord, we pray. **Amen.**

COLLECT

O God the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: we beseech you, leave us not comfortless, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

INTERCESSION

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you have exalted your Son Christ Jesus to your right hand, and made him the head over all things for his body the Church: hear us as we pray for the Church throughout the world ...

Make us and all your people receptive to the gifts he pours upon us, that we may use them to your glory, and the building up of the body of Christ.

Lord, in your mercy:
All hear our prayer.

Lord God Almighty, the Ancient of Days,
you have given your Son all authority in heaven and on earth:
hear us as we pray for the world he came to redeem ...

Grant that we may know even in this time the things that make for peace,
and may strive for the reconciliation of all people
in his kingdom of justice and love.

Lord, in your mercy:
All hear our prayer.

Father of all, whose Son has promised to be with us always, to the end of the age:
hear us as we pray for those among whom we live and work ...

Grant that we may be so aware of his presence with us,
that people may take note of us, that we have been with Jesus.

Lord, in your mercy
All hear our prayer.

O God our Redeemer, whose Son ever lives to make intercession for us:
hear us as we pray for those in any kind of need ...

May he who has borne our infirmities strengthen and heal them
that they may find grace to help in time of need,
and rejoice in his salvation.

Lord, in your mercy:
All hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, whose Son has borne our humanity into the heavenly realms,
and gone before us to prepare a place for us
hear us as we remember before you those whose earthly sojourn is over and whose
life is now hidden in him with you ...

Make us joyful and expectant, that at his coming with all his own
we too may go forth to meet him, and share in his eternal joy.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

RESPONSIVE LITANY

As we wait in silence,

All make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we listen to your word,

All make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we worship you in majesty,

All make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we long for your refreshing,

All make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we long for your renewing

All make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we long for your equipping,

All make us ready for your coming Spirit.

As we long for your empowering,

All make us ready for your coming Spirit.

BENEDICTION

Go now in the peace of Christ, lift your eyes to the heavens,
for He who ascended in glory reigns still.

May the power of the risen and exalted Lord,
fill your hearts with hope, your minds with wisdom,
and your lives with His unshakable joy.

Go forth as His witnesses, carrying His love to the ends of the earth,
until the day He returns in glory.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of
the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. **Amen.**

WEEK 5: HYMNS & SONGS

STF 52	He is exalted
STF 293	All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord
STF 317	At the name of Jesus
STF 331	King of kings, majesty
STF 332	Lord, I lift your name on high
STF 338	There is a Redeemer
STF 364	O for a thousand tongues to sing
STF 568	Alleluia! Sing to Jesus
STF 593	Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour

Taize, Laudate Dominum

ENGLISH

Sing, praise and bless the Lord.
Sing, praise and bless the Lord,
peoples, nations, hallelujah!
Sing, praise and bless the Lord.
Sing, praise and bless the Lord,
peoples, nations, hallelujah

LATIN

Laudate Dominum,
laudate Dominum
omnes gentes, alleluia!
Laudate Dominum,
laudate Dominum
omnes gentes, alleluia!

Best sung accapella. Link to audio of tune

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwRMT2_pi9c

WEEK 5: REFLECTION

During the years I worked in full-time church ministry, I invariably held a worship service on Ascension Day. However, I struggled—often in vain—to encourage people to attend.

Because Ascension Day is 40 days after Easter Day, it ALWAYS falls on a Thursday, making it even harder to get people to turn up. This is a tremendous shame, as Ascension Day is an exceedingly momentous and meaningful day—and something undeniably worth honouring.

At this Ascension tide, here are FIVE crucial reasons for Christians everywhere to celebrate:

1. The Ascension Roars, "It Is Finished!"

The Ascension is a pivotal moment in the history of salvation. Jesus' cry from the cross, *"It is finished,"* signified the completion of His sacrificial work. Yet, His story didn't end there. The resurrection followed, affirming His victory over death. However, the Ascension underscores His earthly work—it serves as a grand punctuation mark that finalises His mission on Earth.

There is nothing more Jesus needs to do on this earth to secure our salvation. Practically speaking, the Ascension reminds us that if there is nothing left for Christ to do to accomplish our salvation, then there is nothing for us to add in order to earn it. There is nothing we can contribute or subtract from God's plan based on our performance. Jesus completed it all.

This is liberating news for anyone burdened by performance-based Christianity. We are not striving to earn God's love; we are living in response to the love already fully given.

2. The Ascension Puts Jesus Firmly in His Place

St. Paul reminded the Christians in Ephesus of God's awesome power:

"When he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion."
(Ephesians 1:20-21, NIV)

Jesus ascended in the flesh—not merely spiritually. He did not leave His body behind in Judea; He ascended bodily, bridging the divide between heaven and earth. This is not merely symbolic; it is a profound truth that Jesus reigns as the Crucified, Resurrected, and Ascended Lord of all creation.

He is enthroned, not as a distant deity but as the very one who walked our dusty roads, wept at gravesides, and felt the sting of betrayal. The Ascension assures us that the one ruling the universe understands our humanity intimately.

3. The Ascension Launches a New Ministry

While Jesus' earthly ministry concluded on Ascension Day, a new phase of His ministry began. Christ is now our advocate, our intermediary, our high priest. As John writes:

"We have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." (1 John 2:1, NIV)

This is one of the great comforts of Scripture: the chaos we create in our lives isn't the final word.

We have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. And here's the best part—the case he presents isn't based on our achievements or undermined by our failures. It's grounded entirely in his own perfect work.

This truth changes how we often view our relationship with God. It's not about climbing some spiritual ladder to reach Him; it's about resting in the assurance that Jesus has already bridged the gap.

4. The Ascension Opens the Way to Pentecost

Remember when Jesus sat with His disciples, preparing them for His departure? *"Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth. It is for your benefit that I go away because if I don't go away, the Counsellor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you."* (John 16:7, NIV)

Without the Ascension, there's no Pentecost. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, the very power of God poured out on all believers, hinges on Jesus ascending to the Father.

Due to the Ascension, Pentecost wasn't merely a possibility; it became an inevitability. Ten days after Jesus ascended—bam! The Spirit descended, not restricted to one person in one location, but filling believers everywhere.

This means the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now dwells within us. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, empowered to live out Christ's mission in the world.

5. The Ascension Blasts Open Our Access to the Throne of Grace

One of the passages that brings me immense comfort is found in Hebrews:

"Since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." (Hebrews 4:14-15, NIV)

What's the result of this staggering promise? The very next verse tells us:

"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:16, NIV)

No matter what we face—sickness, betrayal, failure, or fear—we can approach God confidently because of our Ascended Lord. Jesus isn't distant or disinterested. He's actively interceding for us, our compassionate advocate before the throne.

Bringing the Ascension Front and Centre

The Ascension is a decisive moment on the Christian calendar. Because of it, our lives are different. Today, Christ has gone before us. Where He is now, we will one day be.

Our destiny isn't unknown or undecided. The Ascension assures us that we will join Christ in glory. It proclaims that Jesus' work on earth is finished, and because of that, we don't have to strive to earn God's favour. It's already ours through Christ.

So, let's not relegate Ascension Day to the margins of our faith. Let's bring it front and centre, celebrating it with the joy and reverence it deserves. The Ascension isn't just an event to remember; it's a reality that shapes our present and secures our future.

Where Christ is today, we will one day be.

This is the promise. This is our hope. This is the good news of The Ascension.

*Christ above us,
Christ below us,
Christ beside us,
Christ within us.*

*Risen Lord,
You have ascended in glory,
Yet You are closer than our breath.
High King of Heaven,*

*You reign beyond the clouds,
Yet Your Spirit dwells in our hearts.*

*Lift our eyes to see Your majesty,
Lift our hearts to rest in Your grace,
Lift our lives to walk in Your way.*

*Until we rise to meet You,
May Your peace go before us,
Your love surround us,
And Your light guide us home. Amen.*



Sermons in Art #5

Salvador Dali: The Ascension

When you hear the word "Ascension," what comes to mind?

Perhaps a mental image of Jesus floating upwards like a divine balloon, vanishing into the clouds.

But hold on—the Ascension is far more than that.

In fact, it may be the very heart of our faith. Yes, you heard me correctly. Not the Cross. Not the Resurrection. The Ascension. Allow me to explain.

So, What *Is* the Ascension?

In the Creed, we say, "*He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*" It sounds majestic, certainly, but what does that really mean? *Spoiler: it's not about a golden throne in the sky.*

The Ascension serves as God's cosmic stamp of approval on everything Jesus accomplished—his life, death, and Resurrection. Consider it as God proclaiming, "*Yes! This is precisely how it's done.*"

But here's the kicker: the Ascension isn't merely some ancient historical footnote.

It signifies that Jesus didn't just save us *back then*; he's saving us *right now*. His work didn't conclude at the empty tomb. It's ongoing, alive, and occurring in real-time.

We're not just spectators in a 2,000-year-old story; we're participants in a living, breathing faith.

Wait, So How Do We Experience This?

Great question. The Ascension bridges the gap between "*then*" and "*now*." It signifies that we can truly experience the Christ Event—not merely as a distant memory, but as a reality.

We're not just recalling Calvary or the empty tomb; we're present with Christ in his glorified, Ascended body.

And no, this isn't some cosmic cannibalism (sorry, ancient Romans, you got that one wrong). We're not munching on history. We're communing with the living Christ—body, blood, soul, and divinity. It's a direct line to God, available at any time.

Enter Salvador Dali: The Master of the Mystical

Now, let's discuss Salvador Dalí—yes, the chap with the wild moustache and an even wilder imagination. Dalí painted four major works featuring Jesus, and they all share a common theme: the crucifixion isn't merely about death. It's about ascent, transcendence, and transformation.

One of his most captivating works is *The Ascension: Pieta*. Critics have much to say about it, but here are the highlights:

- **Christ's Feet:** The dirty soles are the last glimpse the disciples would've had. They symbolise Jesus' journey with us on this dusty, messy earth.
- **The Nucleus:** Dali painted Jesus ascending into a bright, circular shape that could be an atom, the sun, or even life itself. Dali called it "the true representation of the unifying nature of Christ."
- **Mary's Tears:** Modelled after Dali's wife, Gala, Mary weeps for her son and the world's ongoing struggles.
- **The Holy Spirit:** Represented by a dove, ever-present, interwoven with Christ's journey upward.

When you first see *The Ascension*, something feels off—in the best possible way. Christ's body is flawless, untouched by the marks of crucifixion. No nail scars, no spear wound, no evidence of the brutal ordeal he endured. His feet are smooth, which is jarring considering the rough, dusty roads he must have walked. Is this the post-Resurrection Christ? It seems so, yet it doesn't fit the usual mould.

Here's the real head-scratcher: Dali puts his wife, Gala, above Christ in the painting. That's a bold move. In most Ascension art, Jesus is at the top, rising above humanity. But Dali flips the script. Why?

Maybe because this isn't about Christ going "up" in the traditional sense, he's not just ascending to heaven; he's transcending dimensions. Instead of floating skyward, he's diving into the very fabric of reality, into the core of existence itself. It's less about altitude and more about depth.

The Crucifixion Hidden in Plain Sight

Look closely at Christ's pose. It's not the typical serene, arms-raised-to-the-heavens stance. His body mirrors the crucifixion: feet aligned, arms stretched wide, tension radiating through his muscles. He's even wearing the loincloth from his Passion, not the glorious robes you'd expect in an Ascension scene. It's as if Dali says, *"You can't separate the Ascension from the Crucifixion. They're two sides of the same cosmic coin."*

Dali's painting feels like an Ascension frozen mid-Crucifixion. Why mash these events together? Maybe because true resurrection isn't all sunshine and rainbows. It's born from agony, sacrifice, and cosmic upheaval. This isn't a sanitised, picture-perfect resurrection; it's raw, real, and world-shattering.

And then there's Gala, looking on. To follow Christ, she would have to twist, to be pulled into the gravitational force he's creating. Christ isn't just rising; he's flipping reality inside out, pulling all creation into a new, redeemed centre.

Stretching Our Spiritual Imagination

Dali's depiction of the Ascension is compelling because it captures the paradox of our faith: victory through suffering, life through death, and presence through absence. In the painting, Christ's hands are stretched wide, and his muscles are tense, not in defeat but cosmic triumph. The red, turbulent background hints at the battles still raging in the world, but Jesus is in command, pulling all creation—heaven and earth—into unity.

Without the Ascension, our faith could seem like an old, dusty relic. But with it? We possess a dynamic, living connection to God. Dali, who was once an atheist, eventually found his way to the Catholic Church. Perhaps, just perhaps, his art guided him there. And perhaps it can lead us deeper, too.

So next time you see *The Ascension*, don't just glance at it.

Dive in. Let it twist your perception, pull at your soul, and maybe, just maybe, flip your understanding of faith inside out.

WEEK 5: SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

In a world that constantly demands our attention, finding moments of stillness can feel impossible. Our days are filled with noise—emails, social media, endless to-do lists—leaving little room for silence, reflection, or spiritual awareness.

Yet, amid the busyness, God invites us to pause, breathe, and listen.

The practice of the **Sacred Pause** is a simple yet transformative way to reconnect with God throughout the day.

It allows us to step away from the rush, even for just a few moments, and become aware of His presence in the here and now.

What is the Sacred Pause?

A Sacred Pause is a short, intentional moment of stillness taken throughout the day to center ourselves in God's presence. It's a chance to stop, breathe, and acknowledge the divine in the ordinary.

Whether it lasts ten seconds or ten minutes, this pause creates a sacred space where we can quiet our minds, listen with our hearts, and offer gratitude for the present moment.

The goal is not to escape life's responsibilities but to bring a sense of mindfulness and spiritual connection into them.

By weaving these moments of stillness into our day, we allow God's presence to shape our thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

How to Practice the Sacred Pause

1. Notice the Present Moment

Wherever you are—whether at work, at home, or on the go—pause for a few seconds and become aware of your surroundings.

What do you see, hear, and feel? Notice the sunlight through the window, the hum of conversation, the rhythm of your breath.

Allow yourself to be fully present.

2. Take a Deep Breath

Close your eyes for a moment and take a slow, deep breath. Inhale God's peace; exhale your worries.

Let your breath be a reminder that God is the giver of life, sustaining you in every moment.

3. Offer a Silent Prayer

Whisper a simple prayer of gratitude: *"Thank You, Lord, for this moment."* Or a prayer of surrender: *"God, I give this day to You."*

Your prayer doesn't need to be long—just an honest offering of yourself to God.

4. Set Aside Intentional Silence

Beyond these quick pauses, consider setting aside longer periods of intentional silence each day. This could be five minutes in the morning, during lunch, or before bed.

Turn off distractions, sit in stillness, and simply be with God. Listen not just with your ears but with your heart, allowing Him to speak in the quiet.

5. Let the Pause Shape Your Day

As you return to your tasks, carry the stillness with you. Let the peace of the Sacred Pause guide your words, actions, and interactions.

Over time, these moments will become a natural rhythm, drawing you closer to God in the everyday.

The Power of Pausing

Pausing for even a few seconds can shift our perspective. It reminds us that we are not alone, that God is present in the ordinary, and that our days are filled with sacred moments waiting to be noticed.

Jesus Himself often withdrew to quiet places to pray and be with the Father (Luke 5:16). If the Son of God needed these pauses, how much more do we?

So today, take a Sacred Pause. Stop, breathe, and invite God into the moment. In the stillness, you may just hear His whisper.

WEEK 5: WRITING PROMPT

1. **Personalising the Ascension's Impact**

You could include a personal reflection or story about how the Ascension has shaped your own faith. Perhaps consider moments in your life when the Ascension's message of Jesus' completed work and ongoing intercession became especially meaningful to you.

2. **Ascension as a Call to Action**

While we've highlighted the theological significance of the Ascension, you could explore how the Ascension calls Christians to action. How does the Ascension challenge us to embrace the mission of God?

3. Theological Exploration of “Seated at the Right Hand of God”

You’ve mentioned the verses from Ephesians regarding Jesus being seated at the right hand of God. You could expand on the meaning of this position of authority. What does it signify for believers today that Christ is not only reigning in Heaven but interceding on our behalf?

4. The Spiritual Significance of the 10 Days Between Ascension and Pentecost

The time between Ascension and Pentecost is often overlooked, but it could be fascinating to explore this "waiting" period. What might we learn from the disciples’ obedience in this in-between time, as they awaited the promised Holy Spirit?

WEEK 5: SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

The Ascension of Jesus, as depicted in Luke 24:44-53, holds profound significance for Christians, influencing theology, worship, and daily life. To explore its impact, consider the following discussion questions:

1. How does the Ascension affirm Jesus' divine nature and authority?

In Luke 24:51, Jesus is "carried up into heaven," symbolizing His exaltation and divine authority. How does this event reinforce our understanding of Jesus as both fully human and fully divine?

2. What implications does the Ascension have for our understanding of Jesus' ongoing work?

Jesus' Ascension signifies the completion of His earthly ministry and the commencement of His heavenly intercession. How does this shape our perception of His current role in the life of believers?

3. How does the promise of the Spirit in Luke 24:49 relate to the Ascension?

Jesus instructs His disciples to await the Holy Spirit's empowerment. How does the Ascension set the stage for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and what does this mean for us today?

4. How does the Ascension shape our understanding of the Church's mission?

With Jesus' physical departure, the Church is entrusted with continuing His work. How does the Ascension define the mission and purpose of the Church today?

5. In what ways does the Ascension encourage a heavenly perspective in our daily lives?

Paul writes about setting our minds on things above. How does reflecting on the Ascension inspire us to prioritize spiritual over earthly matters?

6. What role does worship play in response to the Ascension, as seen in Luke 24:52-53?

After witnessing the Ascension, the disciples worshiped Jesus with great joy. How should the Ascension inspire our worship practices and attitudes today?

7. How does the Ascension help us understand Jesus' presence with us?

Though Jesus ascended, He promised to be with us always. How do we reconcile His physical absence with His spiritual presence in our lives?

These questions encourage deep reflection on the Ascension's significance, fostering a richer appreciation of its impact on our faith and daily living.