***The Churches of St Mary, Cleeton St Mary; St Giles, Farlow; St John the Baptist, Middleton Scriven; Holy Trinity, Sidbury, St Michael, Silvington; and St Mary, Stottesdon***

**Informal Worship for the Sunday after the Ascension**

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*We begin our worship for the Easter season with the Easter Acclamation*

Alleluia. Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

*We call to mind those times when we have not been obedient to God’s will for us, and make our confession:*

We have not always worshipped God, our creator.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

We have not always followed Christ, our Saviour.

Christ, have mercy.

**Christ, have mercy.**

We have not always trusted in the Spirit, our guide.

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

*A Prayer for absolution:*

May the Father forgive us

by the death of his Son

and strengthen us

to live in the power of the Spirit

all our days. **Amen.**

*Today’s psalm is the first ten verses of Psalm 68, a psalm of thanksgiving:*

1 Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered; ♦ let those that hate him ﬂee before him.

2 As the smoke vanishes, so may they vanish away; ♦ as wax melts at the ﬁre, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

3 But let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; ♦ let them make merry with gladness.

4 Sing to God, sing praises to his name; exalt him who rides on the clouds. ♦ The Lord is his name; rejoice before him.

5 Father of the fatherless, defender of widows, ♦ God in his holy habitation!

6 God gives the solitary a home and brings forth prisoners to songs of welcome, ♦ but the rebellious inhabit a burning desert.

7 O God, when you went forth before your people, ♦ when you marched through the wilderness,

8 The earth shook and the heavens dropped down rain, at the presence of God, the Lord of Sinai, ♦ at the presence of God, the God of Israel.

9 You sent down a gracious rain, O God; ♦ you refreshed your inheritance when it was weary.

10 Your people came to dwell there; ♦ in your goodness, O God, you provide for the poor.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; ♦ as it was in the beginning is now and shall be forever. Amen.

*The Bible reading from the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the Ascension and of what the disciples did when they got back to Jerusalem:*

**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.’

**12**Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. **13**When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+1%3A6-14&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-26926a)] James. **14**All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

*Reflection:*

I’ve always been fascinated by what happens in the times between. There is that Saturday in Holy Week, when the disciples rested, according to the Commandment: what were they thinking? What did they talk about? Then the gaps in between Jesus’ appearances after the Resurrection. Luke tells us this was forty days, but we only have a record of a few meetings between Jesus and his friends. What happened in between?

And here we have another, similar, situation – except that we’re given a little bit of an answer. At the end of the forty days, Jesus left the disciples with a command: by the power of the Holy Spirit, they would become his witnesses to the ends of the earth. No time scale, no further instructions. What a demand on faith! Then Jesus leaves the created world and returns to the eternity of the creator.

So the eleven go back from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. We’re given a list of those who are there: the eleven disciples, being the original twelve without Judas Iscariot; but there were also the women who had come with them to Jerusalem, and these must have included Mary Magdalene, who first saw Jesus after the resurrection; and it certainly incudes Jesus’s family, because they’re mentioned. Mary his mother is there, and his brothers. These became important later on: James the brother of Jesus was the leader of the Christians in Jerusalem after Peter left for Rome.

But we also know of others who must have been there. The next little piece of the story tells us about Peter taking the initiative. He says that they must choose a replacement for Judas to make the number of disciples back up to twelve. It’s a lovely moment, and very revealing. Today’s reading tells us that the company spent their time in prayer, but you get the feeling from the whole gospel story that Peter is an active rather than a contemplative. Things need to be done.

So they choose a new twelfth man from among others who are with them in Jerusalem. The choice is made from those who have been Jesus’s followers right from the early days, and after casting lots the choice falls on Matthias ahead of Barsabbas. How many of them were actually there in Jerusalem, in the Upper Room, where they made their headquarters – presumably the same Upper Room where they had eaten the Passover with Jesus at the Last Supper, in the house reputedly owned by the mother of Mark the gospel-writer?

I find this part of the story tantalising. We don’t know who was there, we don’t know what they did beyond an election and a lot of prayer. And, most of all, we don’t know what they felt. There must have been keen anticipation of the coming of the Holy Spirit, but when would he come to them? How would it happen? There must, surely, have been nervousness about what they were expected to do: witnesses to the ends of the earth? Us? Four fishermen, a toll-collector, a bunch of ordinary, everyday working men – and the women, who’d already been daring enough in following Jesus and supporting him in the first place.

But faith works in both directions. I’ve spoken of the demand on the disciples’ faith by Jesus, as he left them with his instructions. But what about the faith shown by Jesus in these ordinary decent good citizens? Not kings, not soldiers, not priests – but ordinary decent good citizens. ‘You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth. And, by the power of the Holy Spirit, this was just what they became. Amen.

*In the Affirmation of Faith, let us share our faith in God the Holy Trinity with Christians around the world:*

   **We believe in God the Father,**

**from whom every family**

**in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,**

**who lives in our hearts through faith,**

**and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,**

**who strengthens us**

**with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;**

**Father, Son and Holy Spirit.** **Amen.**

*Wherever we are today, we come together in the Spirit as the body of Christ to join together in our prayers, using these words or your own:*

Father, as we come together to remember and recall the story of the Ascension, we give thanks for all men and women of vision who have dared to follow Jesus, and all we remember who have shared their faith with us. Help us in our turn to dare – to walk with you and show your love to all in need of friendship and compassion today, to feel less nervous about sharing our own faith and telling the story.

Father, with us always,

**Hear us and help us.**

We remember today’s ordinary, everyday working men and women – today’s ordinary, decent good citizens – who show such love of neighbour through their restraint, self-sacrifice, and generosity of spirit. We gave thanks for all who work so hard today, in this strange in-between time, to help those who are isolated, those far from their families, the frightened, doubting or despairing. We pray for the neglected in our world, all those struggling to survive, those facing the loss of jobs and livelihoods, those caught up in the pandemic, in violence, in war, in poverty.

Father, with us always,

**Hear us and help us.**

We ask your blessing too on all those who strive to brighten the word today. We thank you for the dedication and goodness of those who serve others in great and in small things, for those who contribute in any way to our loving, generous community spirit. We pray especially today for all going back to work, especially in our schools, that those in places of responsibility may genuinely hear their concerns and place their safety and welfare at the heart of all that they do. Give courage and integrity to all those in positions of responsibility.

Father, with us always,

**Hear us and help us.**

Father God, help us all to be today’s ordinary, good witnesses to you in all that we do. We ask your blessing upon all who are ill, who are dying, all who are bereaved and all who mourn. May our loved ones departed rejoice in you, and rest in the glory of your kingdom.

Father, with us always,

**Hear us and help us.**

*The Collect for the Sunday after the Ascension:*

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 forever.

*We share the Covid-19 Prayer for all those suffering in any way from the virus:*

Keep us, good Lord,

under the shadow of your mercy.

Sustain and support the anxious,

be with those who care for the sick,

and lift up all who are brought low;

that we may find comfort

knowing that nothing can separate us from your love

in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*We finish our prayers with the daily prayer that Jesus taught his friends as we say The Lord’s Prayer*

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.

*When Jesus came to his disciples in the evening of the first Easter Day, he blessed them with his peace, and so we share the peace across our churches, our communities, our world:*

The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then were they glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia!

May the peace of the Lord be with us all. Alleluia!

*We finish our worship by blessing each other in the words of the Grace:*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

*After this service is read, Holy Communion will be celebrated at the Rectory; if you wish, you can share this through the Prayer of Spiritual Communion, which is for all of us in our homes:*

*Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits you have given me, for all the pains and insults you have borne for me. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, I ask you to come spiritually into my heart. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.*

*If you feel like singing, this is a good way to start worship in the morning:*

Morning has broken, like the first morning,
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird.
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning,
Praise for them springing fresh from the word.

Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from heaven,
Like the first dew fall on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness where His feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning,
Born of the one light Eden saw play.
Praise with elation, praise every morning,
God's re-creation of the new day.

*And, to finish, this hymn is the great celebration of the Ascension:*

Hail the day that sees him rise, Alleluia!
to his throne above the skies; Alleluia!
Christ, the Lamb for sinners given, Alleluia!
enters now the highest heaven! Alleluia!

There for him high triumph waits; Alleluia!
lift your heads, eternal gates! Alleluia!
he hath conquered death and sin; Alleluia!
take the King of glory in! Alleluia!

Lo! the heaven its Lord receives, Alleluia!
yet he loves the earth he leaves; Alleluia!
though returning to his throne, Alleluia!
still he calls mankind his own. Alleluia!

See! he lifts his hands above; Alleluia!
See! he shows the prints of love: Alleluia!
Hark! his gracious lips bestow, Alleluia!
blessings on his Church below. Alleluia!

Still for us he intercedes, Alleluia!
his prevailing death he pleads, Alleluia!
near himself prepares our place, Alleluia!
he the first fruits of our race. Alleluia!

Lord, though parted from our sight, Alleluia!
far above the starry height, Alleluia!
grant our hearts may thither rise, Alleluia!
seeking thee above the skies. Alleluia!