

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



**Prayers and Reflections
for use at home**

**Sunday 24 May 2020
Sunday after Ascension**

Welcome to this week's Prayers and Reflections. We have moved on to Ascension, and it's the day that the eleven have been dreading. It's time for Jesus to go. His leaving marks a season of waiting - waiting to see, waiting to receive. And, we too are in waiting mode as the restrictions begin to ease, and we hope for a time when we can see our loved ones again and be with them. Waiting is not passive nor a waste of our time. God wants us to wait and learn with him - to look back, to look forwards.

May these Prayers and Reflections help us to learn the art of waiting, God-breathed waiting filled with patience and hope.

Stay well, stay calm. Trust in God's presence as the "Stay at Home" restrictions are eased gradually and we learn to live with its uncertainties, as well as its possibilities.

God bless,

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A Prayer for this season of Waiting on God's Spirit

Almighty God,
your ascended Son has sent us into the world
to preach the good news of your kingdom:
inspire us with your Spirit
and fill our hearts with the fire of your love,
that all who hear your Word
may be drawn to you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Prayers and Reflections
for use at home on the Sunday after Ascension
Waiting

PREPARING OURSELVES

Take a moment to be still in God's presence and feel his love. If you are indoors, you may wish to light a candle as a sign of God's love - here, in your room. When you are ready, say this Eastertide greeting.

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Take a moment to notice how you feel having said these words.

LETTING GO

We continue to watch and wait for the storm to calm. Life is changing, a new "normal" is beginning to emerge. Yet - we cannot be with those who are dearest to us or hug them. We cannot come together in church, or re-join our favourite groups. Depending on how you are feeling, there is light in our darkness or darkness in our light. This is a space in which you can open your heart to God, acknowledging how you are feeling. One or more of these Eastertide confessions may reflect your regrets from the past seven days.

Like Mary at the empty tomb,
at times, I have failed to grasp the wonder of your presence.
Forgive me.

Like the disciples behind locked doors,
at times, in my fear, I have forgotten to care for others.
Forgive me.

Like the disciples in Jerusalem,
I am beginning to learn the art of patience;
at times, I have failed in my waiting. Forgive me.

Feel God's forgiveness. You are his beloved child. He is with you - always, nothing can separate you from his love. May this thought inspire you to wait with trust and hope, and to help others to do the same.

PRAYING TODAY'S PRAYER **(The Collect)**

Across our villages and the worldwide Church, this prayer is being said today. Add your voice to this earthly circle of prayer to our loving Father.

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.**

Our prayer today is one of aching loneliness and fear of the days to come, echoing that moment of parting as Jesus returned home. The Apostles must have felt so very ill-equipped for the awesome responsibilities they've been given. This plea could have been theirs. It's a reminder to us that, sometimes, we too need to recognise that we cannot do this all on our own, and God knows this. It's why he's given us his Spirit as our Go-Between, to connect us to him, to his love, and to strengthen us.

How can God's Spirit comfort you at this time?



LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

The Ascension of Jesus

So when the apostles had come together, they asked Jesus, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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.' When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 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.'

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. 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 James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Acts 1:6-14

It is perhaps the day that they've been dreading. It is time for Jesus to go, to leave them on their own. I expect that you've faced a day like this in your own life. Maybe, it was when you left home for the very first time? For me, it's a bit like the day when we drove up to York with my niece's key possessions, and left her there to start a new life at Uni. There were tears of parting on both sides! I wonder - how did it feel when you left behind the security of your parents' home and set out on your own?

It is time for the apostles to do just this. But - there is one big difference. Having given them all the training and life experience that he could cram into three short years, Jesus is leaving them. He is going home to heaven, to his Father's house, and leaving them on their own.

Picture them as they walk away from that place of parting. I imagine that it was like leaving a graveside after a funeral knowing that, in this life, you'll never see your loved one again. You have to learn to live, to thrive, without them. Which - at that moment of parting - feels like a very big, an impossible, ask. They need this waiting time between Jesus' leaving and the Spirit's coming to look back at the time they've spent with him, absorb what has been happening, what it all means, and look forward in hope to what lies before them. It's in the great moments of their time with Jesus - his daily teaching... his signs and wonders... his loving care... his prayer life... that they'll start to grasp why they have to live through the pain of parting to fly solo. It's the only way that his good news can be set free to spread across the globe as God's presence is set free from the religious confines of the Temple in Jerusalem. From now on, thanks to Jesus' parting gift of the Holy Spirit, the gap between earth and heaven will dissolve, and every one of his followers will feel that they can abide in God's love anywhere, not just in this one sacred space.

Waiting can be God's gift to us. A sign that he wants us to take the time to look back at the journey we have been on and notice where he has been at work in our lives so that, in the firm hope that he will do so again in the future, we can learn to live through the suffering and sadness, disorientation and loneliness of the current season. What are you waiting on from God? Can waiting be part of his loving response to you? His caring answer to your prayers?



A Prayer of Waiting

You keep us waiting.
You, the God of all time;
you want us to wait,
wait to discover your plan -
for our world,
for our lives,
as the storm begins to calm,
in our nation,
in our hearts.

Thank you for the waiting time.



You keep us loving.
You, the God whose name is love,
you inspire us to reach out in love
to our neighbours,
as we wait to be with our families.
You want us to wait,
so we can learn about your love -
its past, present and future,
and wait with love-filled hope.

Thank you for the waiting time.

And in all this,
You keep us.
You hold us.

Safe.

Amen.

inspired by John Bell

OUR PRAYERS

Here are some Ascension prayers. Feel free to use one or more of these prayers, and to add your own.

Risen and Ascended Lord, you want me to wait and hope,
to trust that all will be well,
despite the sadness and separation
of this uncertain time.

Help me to look back and see
all that your Father has given me,
in the past, and to hope that he will do so again.

It will give me the strength to live with the pain of what is,
and to trust in what will be.

Risen Lord, hear my prayer.

Risen and Ascended Lord, your apostles must have felt so alone, and out of their depth, on the day of parting.

Pour out your strengthening Spirit upon all leaders who are struggling at this time. It is not an easy time to be in charge, to make decisions. I pray for...

Risen Lord, hear my prayer.

Risen and Ascended Lord, your love embraces all of your creation, and your heart breaks at the sight of human pain and suffering.

Pour out your healing Spirit on those who are sick, and on those who are grieving. I lift up to you...

Strengthen our amazing and self-giving doctors, nurses and carers, they are your compassionate hearts and loving hands.

Risen Lord, hear my prayer.

Offer your own heartfelt prayers and yearnings, praise and thanksgivings.

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.**

PRAYER OF BLESSING

A closing Ascension prayer of blessing.

Risen and Ascended Lord, as I wait on your Spirit's coming, grant me the patience to wait with hope, trusting in the future because of all you have already been to me. Hold me safe in your love, and watch over my family and friends too, I pray. **Amen.**