

## Ascension

For video: <https://vimeo.com/421851801/3c9d2fe924>

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

On this day of all days we stop to acknowledge those who have gone before us in this place. Today we pause to think about what it means that Jesus ascended to the Father, stepping beyond time and space. And so, standing in our time and our space we recognise the Wadi Wadi people who have walked this place for so many generations. We acknowledge their Elders, past, present and those who will follow. The scriptures tell us that Jesus was blessing the disciples as He ascended. Today we ask Him to bless our indigenous brothers and sisters throughout the land and especially here in this place.

### **Call to Worship (Psalm 68)**

Sing to God, sing praises to His name;  
Lift up a song to Him who rides upon the clouds –  
His name is the Lord, be exultant before Him.  
Father of orphans and protector of widows  
is God in His holy habitation.  
God gives the desolate a home to live in;  
He leads out the prisoners to prosperity,  
But the rebellious live in a parched land.

### **Prayer**

***Holy God,  
Source and sustenance of all  
We adore you.***

By You the planets spin  
Through You the seasons turn  
For You the wildflowers bloom  
With You the songbirds sing  
From You all families grow,  
To You the lost come home,  
On You the meek stand tall  
In You the dead now live,  
For You the Christ rules all.

***Holy God,  
The love that fills all things,  
We adore You.***

*(Bruce Prewer, Australians at Prayer)*

## Song – El Shaddai, Amy Grant

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=DuXB1a3NBCw>

*[Chorus:]*

El-Shaddai, El-Shaddai *[means "God Almighty, God Almighty"]*  
El-Elyon na Adonai *[means "God in the highest, Oh, Lord"]*  
Age to age, You're still the same  
By the power of the name  
El-Shaddai, El-Shaddai  
Erkamka na Adonai *[means "We will love You, Oh, Lord"]*  
We will praise and lift You high  
El-Shaddai

Through Your love  
And through the ram  
You saved the son  
Of Abraham  
Through the power  
Of Your hand  
Turned the sea

Into dry land  
To the outcast  
On her knees  
You were the God  
Who really sees  
And by Your might  
You set Your children free

Through the years  
You made it clear  
That the time of Christ  
Was near  
Though the people  
Couldn't see  
What Messiah ought to be  
Though Your Word  
Contained the plan  
They just could not understand  
Your most awesome work was done  
Through the frailty of Your son.

## Prayer of Confession

You know that I love to find ways to connect our words with our physical reality, rocks, water, art...

As we pray together, whether it's Saturday night, Sunday or Monday morning can I ask you to use your hands as we come before God. With our hands we pick things up and put things down, we give to others and we receive from them.

Let's take a few moments to reflect on the last few days. What are the things that have drawn us away from God; have there been times when our words or even our thoughts have not been what they should; is there something that even today is putting a wall between us and the One who loves us?

Take a moment to imagine that those things are in your hands right now and using your own words bring them to the Lord, turn your hands over and put them down before Him.

*Pause*

Now take a moment to lay your hands open on your lap and allow God to give you His grace, forgiveness, understanding, peace, insight, rest, wisdom... what is it that you need for this day? The One who knitted you together in your mother's womb knows exactly what you need and longs for you to stop and receive those gifts.

*Pause*

God of the beginning and the end, You know us through and through. Even when we hide from others and from ourselves, we can never hide from You. We bring our open hearts today, acknowledging our weakness and our failures, knowing that Your word assures us that

You hear and forgive. Lord, sometimes we stop there – with our failures and weakness – but we need to also acknowledge that You long to lift us up, to provide for us, to let Your love flood into our hearts and pour through us.

Thankyou that Your grace and love are so much greater than our failures.

Open our eyes and hearts to understand that more and more each day, and as we grow in that grace help us to share that understanding with everyone we meet.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

## **Bible Reading – Wendy Fenton**

### **Acts 1: 6-14**

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.”

12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

### **John 17: 1-11**

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

6 “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. 8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. 9 I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. 10 All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. 11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

## **Song – Father make us one**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuaE5Q0sHEI>

Father, make us one,  
Father, make us one  
That the world may know Thou hast sent the Son,  
Father make us one.

## **Meditation**

Today we come to the Ascension, a milestone in our history.

Today we see more restrictions being eased as we start to walk out of these weeks of isolation into whatever 'normal' is going to look like.

Back in John 20:17 on Easter morning Jesus told Mary to go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' The disciples understanding of who God was had changed so much as they had walked and listened to Jesus, watched the way He treated people, how He spoke to them. That happens for us too. We don't always stop and take the time to see how our understanding has changed but it's often in times of difficulty and struggle that we come to know something new about who God is and who we are.

Jesus reminds the disciples that God is not just His, but ours, not just His Father, but our Father too. In a time of such challenge, what have you found out about your Father and your God? Have you found that God is your refuge? That He is your Peace (Jehovah Shalom)? That He is your provider (Jehovah Jireh)? What would you say about who God is today?

## **Message**

As I started doing some background for this Sunday I discovered something I had never heard of before, Rogation Days.

"Mamertus was the bishop of Vienne in France from 461 to 475.

His Episcopacy was marked by near-continuous disaster. In the space of a single year - around AD 470 - a fire destroyed the king's palace, a pestilence killed the cattle, the populace was terrorized by attacks of hungry wolves, and there were a series of earthquakes. (Sounds a bit like our 2020 doesn't it?)

In response, Mamertus led his flock in three days of prayer and procession leading up to the feast of the Ascension, He is reported to have said: "We shall pray to God that He will turn away the plagues from us, and preserve us from all ill, from hail and drought, fire and pestilence, and from the fury of our enemies; to give us favorable seasons, that our land may be fertile, good weather and good health, and that we may have peace and tranquility, and obtain pardon for our sins." The disasters ended. Other bishops in the region quickly adopted the same practice. In AD 511, the Fifth Council of Orleans made the three days of prayer mandatory in France. In the 9th Century, Pope Leo III extended the practice to the entire church."

(Carl Fortunato Liturgies.net)

As the years went by in England this grew into the tradition of Beating the Bounds. The church was responsible for looking after everyone in their parish, particularly providing for the poor so taxes were collected to be distributed as needed. The boundaries of each parish were marked by large stones. The Sunday before Ascension became known as Rogation Sunday (*rogare – to ask a blessing*), starting then and finishing on Ascension Sunday the parish boundary was walked by the clergy and members of the community taking sticks to clear the path, walking around the

boundary of the parish and praying for their community. It was important for young boys to take part, one day they would be the ones walking this path, they needed to be familiar with the boundaries so they were passed on accurately. Around England the tradition continues.

At the back of the women's shoe section of the Marks and Spencer department store in Oxford, England, behind a rack of summer sandals, next to the elevator, you'll find an odd thing. It's out of place, doesn't belong among this season's pumps and slingbacks. Shoppers pass by oblivious, not noticing there's a relic of ancient Oxford right under their noses. The mysterious object is a carved stone, protected by a glass panel set into the wall. It reads; St Peter le Baily, St Martin, All Saints and St Aldate. It is the boundary marker between the three parishes.

Today the people of the church in Oxford still Beat the Boundary, praying for the community, praying for the world, praying for all of creation.

In Australia our indigenous culture talks of the songlines – the stories of their land passed down from one generation to the next, sacred places, waterholes, ancient camp sites and features of the land – the songline guides your physical journey from one place to another and connects you to your past and future.

I remember being part of a community where people have walked the boundary. When the property for ICS Calderwood was purchased; when the property for Kiama Baptist Church was purchased; on our Emmaus Walks where people pray around the property and in each room that will be used; blessing our house where we went into every room and asked God's blessing.

Have you had experience of this?

Our readings today tell us of Jesus' ascension and of His prayer for us – that we would understand how precious we are to our Father and that understanding that we would find ways to share that knowledge with others. The ascension of Jesus means that He is no longer confined to a particular place and time; now we, as His hands and feet, are called to continue the work, to bless the world, the people around us.

The Ascension is where we remind one another, and the world, that God has not left the building. He is still in the business of taking up space in the world through the body of Christ – all of us. All ground is holy, all flesh is sacred, all places ripe with the potential of resurrection.

Jesus has physically gone from the earth, but we know that the story of Christ's redeeming work doesn't end there. It doesn't end with an absence, where the church has nothing to say or do to resist the boundaries breaking creation apart. The story continues on as the church takes up space in the world. As the church beats the bounds, we break apart the artificial boundaries erected by hate and injustice to say that in the Ascension, space is made for all.

### **Now What?**

But what does that mean to you and I? If you were to walk the boundary of our church, where would you walk? Around the buildings? Around the property or fence? Is THAT our boundary?

Sometimes without even realizing it, it's as if we draw a circle and then stand on that boundary joining hands to protect that territory.

What would it take for us to turn around, and look outwards? Instead of guarding our territory, what happens if we see all of Kiama as our territory? All of Jamberoo as our territory? All of our families? All of our neighbours? All of creation?

*Loving God, creator of all, sustainer of all, breath of life and redeemer, our small minds can*

*only comprehend a fraction of who You are. We read Your Word that tells us we are all precious in Your eyes and even that is beyond our grasp sometimes. Help us to be people of vision, beating the bounds of our lives, always searching in the overgrown places of our hearts to find the ones You want us to love and care for, the ones You are waiting for us to pray for. Remind us often that there is no place beyond Your love and grace; no person so far away that You can't take their hand and lead them home, and Lord remind us that sometimes WE have a part to play in their journey, sometimes our hand is the one they need. Help us to follow Jesus' example – to always be leaving a blessing behind us wherever we go. Amen.*

### **Song – People need the Lord**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ZSk0u-pvWI>

Everyday they pass me by  
I can see it in their eyes  
Empty people filled with care  
Headed who knows where  
On they go through private pain  
Living fear to fear  
Laughter hides their silent cries  
Only Jesus hears  
People need the Lord, people need the  
Lord  
At the end of broken dreams, He's the  
open door  
People need the Lord, people need the  
Lord  
When will we realise people need the  
Lord?  
We are called to take His light  
To a world where wrong seems right

What could be too great a cost  
For sharing life with one who's lost?  
Through His love our hearts can feel  
All the grief they bear  
They must hear the words of life  
Only we can share  
People need the Lord, people need the  
Lord  
At the end of broken dreams, He's the  
open door  
People need the Lord, people need the  
Lord  
When will we realize that we must give our  
lives?  
For people need the Lord, people need the  
Lord

*Source: LyricFind  
Songwriters: Greg Nelson / Phill Mchugh*

### **Prayers of the People – Meredith Yabsley**

*(based on Ephesians 2:14, John 17, Galatians 3:28, Romans 12: 5)*

Almighty God,  
by your Holy Spirit, You have made us one with Your saints  
In heaven and on earth.

Help us to see Your presence burning in the hearts of others.  
Grant that we may be united in a fellowship of love and prayer.  
Give us courage to pick up our cross and respond to the needs of the world.  
Give us stamina to follow You, to be your hands and heart in the world.  
Enable us to witness to your grace and mercy.

You have given us the confidence to come to You in prayer and although we know we struggle with the things around us and sometimes lose sight of your will, You invite us into unity with You and with others.

We pray for those who are sick, those who are alone, those who struggle with loss and the grief it brings and we ask that we can reflect your love to them.

In the silence we think of those we know and those we don't.

We pray for gentle hands and gentle words as with think of those who disappoint us, fear us, ignore us, aggrieve us or reject us because we follow You, we ask that we reflect your love to them.

In the silence we think of those we know and those we don't.

We pray for unity in spirit, agreement in our diversity, oneness in our love for you, togetherness our love for each other and our love for the world.

Fill us with your boundless love and bind us together as we go in our diverse ways; United in and by the Spirit who and the ultimate gift of love, Your son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen

### **Song – The Churches One Foundation**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jotNbcFelX4>

The church's one foundation  
is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
she is his new creation  
by water and the word:  
from heaven he came and sought her  
to be his holy bride;  
with his own blood he bought her  
and for her life he died.

2 Called out from every nation,  
yet one through all the earth;  
her charter of salvation  
one Lord, one faith, one birth:  
one holy name she blesses,  
and shares one holy food;  
as to one hope she presses  
with every grace endued.

3 We see her long divided  
by heresy and sect;  
yet she by God is guided  
one people, one elect:  
her vigil she is keeping,  
her cry goes up, 'How long?'  
and soon the night of weeping  
shall be the dawn of song.

4 In toil and tribulation,  
and tumult of her war,  
she waits the consummation  
of peace for evermore:  
till with the vision glorious  
her longing eyes are blessed;  
at last the church victorious  
shall be the church at rest!

5 Yet she on earth has union  
with God the Three-in-One;  
and mystic, sweet communion  
with those whose rest is won:  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, grant to us your grace,  
with them the meek and lowly,  
in heaven to see your face.

**Blessing**

Go into this day knowing that you never go alone, that the One who called creation into being called YOU into being in His very heart and that each and every moment you are held and loved.

May you see the glory of God all around you.

May you feel the Spirit blowing grace your way.

May you be aware of your Redeemer walking beside you each step of the way.

And may you be blessed, and blessed, and blessed.

# Ascension Sunday 2020

Do you remember playing dot to dot with a friend? Here's a variation to encourage our prayers this week. Print it out and put it on the table or near the phone. Through the day as you walk by join up the dots. When you complete a square write a name and stop and pray for them or perhaps a word like 'understanding' and allow the Holy Spirit to show you how to pray for understanding in your own life, in the community, in the world.



If you'd like to read more about Beating the Bounds here are some links;

<http://www.wshc.eu/blog/item/beating-the-bounds-a-parish-tradition.html>

<https://londonist.com/2015/05/beating-the-bounds-is-one-of-londons-oddest-traditions>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abuRK3xLXRo>

<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/beating-the-bounds-tradition>

<http://www.twickenham-museum.org.uk/detail.php?aid=273&cid=51&ctid=3>

Some years ago Jackie French the Australian author wrote a children's book called

**Walking the Boundary**. It's available to download and read on Amazon for .99c – well worth it!