



**DURHAM
CATHEDRAL**

THE SHRINE OF ST CUTHBERT

Praying Together

during the week beginning Sunday 16 May 2021

The Seventh Sunday of Easter

The Sunday after Ascension Day

During this time of anxiety and uncertainty, we want to stay in touch with our regular worshippers and indeed with everyone who is associated with the cathedral family. Worshippers may attend the daily services of Morning and Evening Prayer as well as the daily Eucharist at 12.30 p.m. and may book to attend the two celebrations of the Eucharist on Sunday as well as Sunday Evensong at 3.30 p.m. (without booking).

Durham Cathedral is also still open for private prayer and quiet reflection. If you'd like to come to the Cathedral for services and for prayer, there are some important measures we'd like you to know about, to ensure the safety of members of the public and staff. You can find this information on our website: www.durhamcathedral.co.uk We will continue to live stream services as well so that you will still be able to engage with us online.

Gospel

John 17. 6-19

Jesus said, 'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask

you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.'

Thought for the Day

by the Reverend Canon Professor Simon Oliver

In these ten days between Ascension Day and Pentecost, the Christian Church, the body of people gathered by the Holy Spirit around the risen Jesus Christ, begins to take shape. After the Ascension of Christ, St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, tells us that the disciples returned to Jerusalem and were constantly devoting themselves to prayer. In our first reading this morning, we heard about the next stage in the gathering of the Church: the replacement of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, with Matthias. In our gospel this morning, we heard the final part of Jesus' teaching on the night of his betrayal. This is his prayer for the protection, holiness and unity of his people to be gathered around him as the Church: 'Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.'

There are two themes coming to the fore in these ten days. The first is hope and expectation: the hope that God is beginning his work of gathering and that a new spirit will come upon his people. Matthias is added to the apostles, the witnesses to the risen Christ, as a sign of that hope. The second theme in these ten days is prayer that gives expression to hope – our asking and longing for God. The hope and prayer of the disciples are centred on Jerusalem, a city of eternal hope and eternal prayer. So this morning, I'd like to offer you some reflections on these three: hope, prayer, and Jerusalem. Let's begin with hope.

The first thing to say about Christian hope is that it's not the same as optimism. Optimism is a positive feeling based on things that are likely to happen. I can be optimistic about the easing of lockdown restrictions because the vaccination programme makes it less likely that people will fall seriously ill with covid. Likewise, pessimism is based on what we think is likely. I'm pessimistic about the easing of lockdown restrictions because of the rapid spread of new variants. Optimism and pessimism are driven by the immediate evidence and what we think will happen. Christian hope is not rooted in that kind of evidence. It's not rooted in what we think might or might not happen. It's not rooted in data or spreadsheets or the political

mood of the day. If it were, our hope could not survive those most tragic periods in human history and experience. I'm not hopeful for the Church because the numbers look good. I might be optimistic or pessimistic, but hope has to run deeper than data if it's going to survive and flourish in the world. No, our hope is rooted in Jesus Christ. St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, 'For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.' The disciples, in these ten days before Pentecost, wait in hope for something they do not yet see. That doesn't make their hope irrational or wishful thinking. But their hope isn't rooted in what they think might happen or what they think they might be able to accomplish. Their hope is rooted in what Christ has promised: the Holy Spirit. They wait, knowing that what God can accomplish is so much more than they can predict or anticipate. The resurrection of Jesus had taught them that much.

The disciples wait hopefully in prayer. Prayer is how we give voice to our hope. We come to God with our greatest needs and desires – our longing for what God is yet to give us, our longing for life and peace. The key point is that, when we pray, when we sit with God and ask God, we give expression that we are on a journey into his future. When we pray, we are saying 'this is not yet it, we are still on our way to the new Jerusalem and there is more that God will gift to us and accomplish in us.' In prayer, we are asking in hope for God to draw us into his future.

Both despair and presumption stop prayer. When we despair, when we are literally without hope, we say 'there's no point, this is it – things will not change, the world and our lives are inevitably like this.' When we are presumptuous, we think that the new Jerusalem has already arrived, that God has done everything and we have no part to play. Either way, prayer seems futile or unnecessary. If there's no hope or if everything's already accomplished, why pray? But when we pray, we become a people of hope – a people who look to God's future promised in Christ, even though it's a future we cannot yet see and can barely imagine. Prayer gives voice to hope. This house of prayer is therefore a house of hope.

In these ten days between Jesus' ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, prayer and hope come together very vividly in the city of Jerusalem. The disciples wait in hope and prayer in Jerusalem. The first time I saw Jerusalem, in April 1998, a couple of months before my ordination, I was speechless. We'd driven north from the Dead Sea through the Judean desert, turned a corner and, as if from nowhere, there was the city with its extraordinary panorama: the golden Dome of the Rock, the Al-Aqsa mosque, the Temple Mount and the ancient city walls. All of

human history – at least those cultures and nations touched by Judaism, Christianity and Islam – seemed to coincide in this extraordinary place. At the same time, these ancient stones represented an eternal city and an eternal hope – the new Jerusalem. I loved it. Never have I felt so at home in such a strange and unfamiliar place. So much of my own deep religious heritage, Jewish and Christian, seemed to lie here. This is where King Solomon built his Temple in the tenth century BC, on the site where Abraham is said to have prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. That Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in the early sixth century BC, rebuilt late that same century when the Judahites returned from exile, and destroyed by the Romans around 70AD. I could approach the ruined Western Wall of that very Temple and pray in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a site hallowed since the fourth century as the place of Jesus' crucifixion and burial. The city was vibrant, boisterous and beautiful. There's nothing half-hearted about Jerusalem. It's a city with a sacred passion. But it's also a deeply divided and wounded city – a place of bitter anger and anguish. We're witnessing that anger and anguish right now, in open and deadly conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Is there hope for this city of eternal hope? The evidence suggests not and might give us cause for pessimism. But our faith says 'yes' and we give voice to that hope in praying earnestly for the peace of Jerusalem in expectation that, at the end times, God will draw all people into the heavenly Jerusalem. The expression of that hope is found in the prayer of Jesus we heard this morning: "Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one." That can be our prayer too, for the unity and peace of the Church and the unity and peace of Jerusalem.

A Form of Intercession

Jesus our exalted Lord has been given all authority.
Let us seek his intercession
that our prayers may be perfected by his prayer.

Lord, hear us.
Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, great high priest, living for ever to intercede for us,
pray for the Church, your broken body in the world.

Lord, hear us.
Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, king of righteousness,
enthroned at the right hand of the majesty on high,
pray for the world, and make it subject to your gentle rule.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, Son of Man,
drawing humanity into the life of God,
pray for your brothers and sisters in need, distress or sorrow.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, pioneer of our salvation,
bringing us to glory through your death and resurrection,
surround with your saints and angels
those who have died trusting your promises.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, Lord over all things,
ascended far above the heavens and filling the universe,
pray for us who receive the gifts you give us
For work in your service.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ,
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit
and in the bond of peace,
and bring the whole created order
to worship at your feet;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Hymn

The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now:
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty victor's brow.

The highest place that heaven affords
Is his, is his by right,
The King of kings and Lord of lords,
And heaven's eternal light;

The joy of all who dwell above,
The joy of all below,
To whom he manifests his love,
And grants his name to know.

To them the cross, with all its shame,
With all its grace is given:
Their name an everlasting name,
Their joy the joy of heaven.

They suffer with their Lord below,
They reign with him above,
Their profit and their joy to know
The mystery of his love.

The cross he bore is life and health,
Though shame and death to him;
His people's hope, his people's wealth,
Their everlasting theme.

Thomas Kelly

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Francis Thompson (1859-1907): The Kingdom of God 'In No Strange Land'

The Ascension of Our Lord brings heaven to earth and earth to heave. It allows us to see the kingdom of God within us and beyond us at the same time. It also brings it to where we are – not just in a strange land but here in Durham; in London; anywhere where we are. There God is.

O world invisible, we view thee:
O world intangible, we touch thee:
O world unknowable, we know thee:
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air,
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars:
The drift of pinions, would we harken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places –
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry; and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry, clinging heaven by the hems:
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

A Prayer for use during the Coronavirus outbreak

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

A Prayer for the Ascension of Our Lord

You are not only risen and alive; you are Lord.
This is your ascension,
your ascendancy over the whole universe.
You stand over and above
all that is best in life as its source.
You stand above all that is worst as ultimate victor.
You stand above all powers and authorities as judge.
You stand above all failure and weakness and sin
as forgiveness and love.
You alone are worthy of total allegiance, total commitment.
You are: My Lord and my God.
Amen.

Calendar of Holy Days

Wednesday 19 May	Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, Restorer of Monastic Life, 988
Thursday 20 May	Alcuin of York, Deacon, Abbot of Tours, 804
Friday 21 May	Helena, Protector of the Holy Places, 330

The next issue of *Praying Together*
will be published on Monday 24 May