

Seventh Sunday of Easter  
*Ascension of the Lord*  
May 24, 2020

***St. Stephen's is a Christian community in the making.***

At the intersection of what was and what will be, we invite you to gather with us around prayer, food, and the simple conviction that nothing is wasted in God's economy.

***All are welcome at St. Stephen's.***

Whether you come with great faith or great doubt,  
regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation or marital status,  
whatever your financial status or housing situation –  
we hope you can find a home with us  
as we explore together what it means to follow Jesus.

#### **Ministry Team**

<b>Priest &amp; Lead Pastor</b>	The Reverend Jeff Potter jeff@ststephensmaple.ca (416) 569-4263
<b>Honorary Assistant</b>	The Reverend Mary Pataki mary@ststephensmaple.ca
<b>Director of Music</b>	Scott Weidler scott@ststephensmaple.ca
<b>Pastor to Children and Families</b>	Becky Potter becky@ststephensmaple.ca
<b>Pastor of Outreach</b>	Karen Shea karen@ststephensmaple.ca



# ST. STEPHEN'S

ANGLICAN CHURCH, MAPLE

## Preparation

*Whether you participate in worship in a small group or alone,  
know that you are joined together with the whole St. Stephen's community  
and the wider church as we offer our prayers and praise to God.*

*Consider setting a candle or two out in the space you're using for worship,  
as a reminder of God's presence. Light the candles, and say:*

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

May his grace and peace be with us.

**May he fill our hearts with joy.**

Almighty God,  
to you all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from you no secrets are hidden.  
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## Glory to God

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.  
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

## Collect of the Day

Almighty God,  
your Son Jesus Christ ascended to the throne of heaven  
that he might rule over all things as Lord.  
Keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit  
and in the bond of his peace,  
and bring the whole of creation  
to worship at his feet,  
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
**Amen.**

## First Reading: Acts 1:1-11

Luke writes: In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So when they had come together, they asked him, “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 toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward 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.”

## Psalm 93

The LORD is king, robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and armed with strength.

The LORD has made the world so sure that it cannot be moved.

**Ever since the world began, your throne has been established;  
you are from everlasting.**

The waters have lifted up, O LORD, the waters have lifted up their voice;  
the waters have lifted up their pounding waves.

**Mightier than the sound of many waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea,  
mightier is the LORD who dwells on high.**

Your testimonies are very sure,  
and holiness befits your house, O LORD, forever and forevermore.

## Second Reading: Ephesians 1:15-23

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

## Gospel: Luke 24:44-53

Jesus said to the eleven and those with them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

## Reflection – Jeff+

*The reflection can be watched online by [clicking here](#)  
or can be read in full below.*

*Please feel free to engage with either or both options,  
and know that whatever you choose  
will enable you to fully participate in the worship of our community.*

If you were to crack open your bible, you would see that right after the four Gospels – the four texts that tell the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – comes a book called The Acts of the Apostles. Sometimes we just call it the book of Acts, which is actually an appropriate short form since it really does retell the activities of the birth of the church.

We talk often about how there are different types of books contained in the bible, how it's more a library of texts than a single book, and the books it contains can run from poetry to folk history to personal correspondence to folk history and back again. This book, the Book of Acts, is widely accepted as a work of ancient history. The events that it describes are corroborated in all kinds of other texts, like the letters of St. Paul, as well as lots of writings that aren't in the bible. The author is trying to recount real events, and to tell the story of the building up of the church from a ragtag band of failed followers of the crucified Jesus into a worldwide movement that seeks peace, goodness, and the building up of the world as it was meant to be.

This book of ancient history begins in a strange way. The author says, essentially, 'I just finished telling you about Jesus and what he did and taught up until the day he was taken up into heaven.'

And you'd think that the author would pause here, because people don't get taken up into heaven on your average Friday afternoon.

But he doesn't. He actually backtracks, and makes sure to mention all of the ways that Jesus actually appeared to people, and convinced even skeptical people that he really had risen from the dead.

And then, having died and risen again, Jesus refuses to give the disciples any particular insight into the way the future will unfold (they ask), but he instead promises that the disciples will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (apparently that's supposed to be more than enough). And then, while they were watching, Jesus was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Have you seen drawings of this event? Jesus, radiant with heavenly glory, rising up on a cloud as the disciples reach their heads and their hands up in wonder and amazement. And, of course, they did – what else could they have done? Heads and hands lifted high, witnessing something that we can only wonder at.

Heads and hands raised, entering into the glory of God with nothing more than themselves and their desire to bask in the glow of that moment. Freed, at least for a moment, of their fears and failings. Of their desires and accomplishments and aspirations. Empty-handed. As we contemplate the glory of the Ascension, we ought to wonder if there's any other way to really enter into the glory of God but empty-handed.

And then, as they soak up the last few moments of this dazzling experience, some angels appear. And they essentially say – 'hey guys! What are you looking up there for?'

Which is a ridiculous question, of course. Who on earth wouldn't be looking up, lost in the moment?

But also, an important and formative question. Because, the angels say, Jesus is coming back the same way he went. Which is another way of saying, the action is here. There is work to do, and a world to change. Love to give. A Holy Spirit to receive.

Have you seen that Ascension Day meme that's been going around? It's a picture of Jesus ascending in glory, with a caption that says, 'Ascension Day – when Jesus started working from home.'

I'll admit to laughing the first time I saw it. Because it's funny, especially when COVID leaves us needing to laugh from time to time. But it represents an awful, distorted understanding of God.

This kind of thinking – that 'heaven' is God's home and earth is something to be escaped – is exactly why the Angels ask the disciples why they're still looking up.

You see, Jesus ascends to enter the fullness of the glory of God, revealing in a definitive way who he is and how we should understand his ministry. Not because he has left us. His presence is with us now, as it has been with us through the ages. God loves this earth and everyone in it. Creation is good and holy, and the joy of its creator, and Jesus will return just the way he came.

And the author begins this history text this way for good reason. The whole of the development of the church is oriented by these truths – that Jesus ascended, and that the action is here. Heaven and earth, united. God with us. So today, we're invited to look up and catch a glimpse of the glory of God that leaves us awe-struck and empty-handed. And then we're called to let our gaze return to the ground, where we might see the need around us and share the love of God with our neighbours.

Because our home is with God.

And that is right here.

## **Apostles' Creed**

**I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ,  
his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again  
to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

## **Prayers of the People**

*As a community of people made one in Christ, we offer our prayers to God for ourselves,  
our community, and the world. Feel free to adapt these prayers as you like,  
and to make use of the spaces indicated to add your own prayers and petitions.*

Almighty God, you have promised to hear when we pray in the name of your Son.  
Therefore in confidence and trust we pray for the Church and for the world.

Loving God, enliven the Church for its mission.

**That we may be salt of the earth and light to the world.**

Breathe fresh life into your people.

**Give us power to reveal Christ in word and action.**

Creator of all, lead us and every people into the ways of justice and peace.

**That we may respect one another in freedom and truth.**

Awaken in us a sense of wonder for the earth and all that is in it.

**Teach us to care creatively for its resources.**

God of truth, inspire with your wisdom  
those whose decisions affect the lives of others.

**That all may act with integrity and courage.**

Give grace to all those whose lives are linked with ours.

**May we serve Christ in one another, and love as he loves us.**

Let us now name before God those for whom we offer our personal prayers.

*A period of silence is kept as we offer silent prayer  
and listen for the leading of the Spirit.*

Let us remember before God our selfish ways, the things we have done wrong,  
the sorrows we have caused, the love we have not shown.

**Most merciful God, forgive us our sins against you and against each other.**

**Strengthen us to overcome our weaknesses,  
that we may live in love as you would have us live,  
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour.**

**Amen.**

Lord, you have called us to serve you.

**Grant that we may walk in your presence  
and experience the present truth of resurrection:  
your love in our hearts, your truth in our minds,  
your strength in our wills, until, at the end of our journey,  
we know the joy of our homecoming and the welcome of your embrace,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

## **Lord's Prayer**

And now, as our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

**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.**

## **Blessing**

May joy and nothing less find us on our way.

May we be blessed and be a blessing.

And may light guide us, and countless others, all the way home.

**Amen.**

The Lord has made a promise to love us faithfully forever.

May we live with joy and be led with Peace. Alleluia, Alleluia.

**Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.**

# MUSIC

Following are several hymns that you may want to sing and/or listen to.  
Music and texts, as well as sample YouTube links, are provided.

## Come Down, O Love Divine



1 Come down, O Love di - vine; seek thou this soul of mine  
2 Oh, let it free - ly burn, till world - ly pas - sions turn  
3 Let ho - ly char - i - ty mine out - ward ves - ture be,  
4 And so the yearn - ing strong, with which the soul will long,



and vis - it it with thine own ar - dor glow - ing;  
to dust and ash - es in its heat con - sum - ing;  
and low - li - ness be - come mine in - ner cloth - ing—  
shall far out - pass the pow'r of hu - man tell - ing;



O Com - fort - er, draw near; with - in my heart ap - pear  
and let thy glo - rious light shine ev - er on my sight,  
true low - li - ness of heart, which takes the hum - bler part,  
no soul can guess Love's grace till it be - come the place

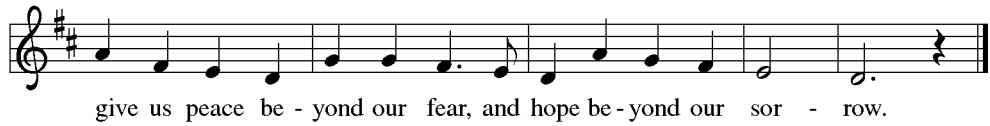
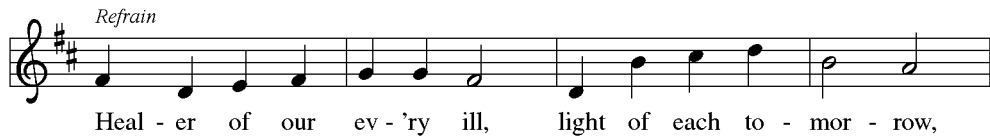


and kin - dle it, thy ho - ly flame be - stow - ing.  
and clothe me round, the while my path il - lum - ing.  
and o'er its own short - com - ings weeps with loath - ing.  
where - in the Ho - ly Spir - it makes a dwell - ing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXO4rqBQOAU>



## Healer of Our Every Ill



- 1 You who know our fears and sad - ness, grace us with your
- 2 In the pain and joy be - hold - ing how your grace is
- 3 Give us strength to love each oth - er, ev - 'ry sis - ter,
- 4 You who know each thought and feel - ing, teach us all your



peace and glad - ness; Spir - it of all com - fort, fill our hearts.  
still un - fold - ing, give us all your vi - sion, God of love.  
ev - 'ry broth - er; Spir - it of all kind - ness, be our guide.  
way of heal - ing; Spir - it of com - pas - sion, fill each heart.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdlMxllvN4>

For other hymns, check out:

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



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ANGLICAN CHURCH, MAPLE

10103 Keele Street  
Maple, Ontario, L6A 3Y8  
416-569-4263  
[www.ststephensmaple.ca](http://www.ststephensmaple.ca)