This short act of worship has been produced for you

whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises.

If you are well enough and able,

why not spend a few moments with God

knowing that others are sharing this act of worship with you.

**Acclamation**

Alleluia! The Lord reigns!

Let the earth rejoice! Alleluia!

Whether celebrating Wesley Day or Aldersgate Sunday or Ascensiontide, we sing the great Charles Wesley hymn:

**Singing the Faith 300 Hail the day that sees him rise**

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7b_ODz_jgTs>

Hail the day that sees him rise, *Alleluia!*

ravished from our wistful eyes! *Alleluia!*

Christ, awhile to mortals given, *Alleluia!*

reascends his native heaven: *Alleluia!*

There the glorious triumph waits: *Alleluia!*

lift your heads, eternal gates; *Alleluia!*

wide unfold the radiant scene; *Alleluia!*

take the King of Glory in! *Alleluia!*

Him though highest heaven receives, *Alleluia!*

still he loves the earth he leaves; *Alleluia!*

though returning to his throne, *Alleluia!*

still he calls the world 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!*

Master, parted from our sight, *Alleluia!*

high above the azure height, *Alleluia!*

grant our hearts to you may rise, *Alleluia!*

Following you beyond the skies: *Alleluia!*

Cast ourselves before your throne, *Alleluia!*

here our heaven of heavens to own, *Alleluia!*

there we shall with you remain, *Alleluia!*

Partners of your endless reign: *Alleluia!*

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

**Prayer of adoration**

Let us pray.

‘Down to earth’ God,

who lived our life and died our death,

we adore you.

God beyond earth and time and space,

whose mystery is beyond our understanding,

we adore you.

God of earth and heaven,

who in the incarnation and the ascension bridges the gap between things human and divine

and opens for us the way to things eternal,

we adore you.

‘Down to earth’ God, God beyond earth and time and space,

God of earth and heaven,

we adore you now and forever. Amen.

**Prayer of confession**

Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence and confess our sins in penitence and faith.

*Silence.*

We proclaim you as Sovereign

enthroned at the right hand of majesty on high,

yet deny your sovereignty over the whole of life.

We proclaim you as High Priest,

living for ever to intercede for us,

yet fail to trust in your love.

We proclaim you as Pioneer of our Salvation,

leading us into the new creation,

yet root ourselves in

immediate concerns without vision or hope.

Risen and ascended Christ, in your mercy**,**

**forgive us and help us.**

Christ is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. (Hebrews 7:25)

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

**Today’s reading Hebrews 7:23 - 8:2 (NRSV)**

In a point-by-point comparison with the Levitical priests of the old covenant, Jesus Christ, high priest, and the effect of his work are demonstrated to be superior.

Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up.

**Time to reflect What’s all this about the ascension!**

Over the last two months or so I’ve had several troubling conversations with a few church members, during which it was either implied or stated that COVID-19 was a punishment from God - for our turning away from God or for our disobedience to God’s will and way.

This has raised for me the fundamental question, ‘What picture do we have of God that such a thought comes to us or is perhaps uppermost in our minds at a time such as this.’ I recognise though that it’s nothing new. Throughout the ages plague or disease was often thought to be God’s punishment. We humans are hard-wired to crave a reason, an answer, why something we find hard to understand or ‘compute’ has happened and, unlike Trump blaming China, in the end its God who takes the blame.

It’s in this context that I come to reflect on Christ’s ascension, which the Church celebrated on Thursday 21st May, Ascension Day. I surprise myself by doing something which in over 46 years as a preacher I’ve never done before - choosing a reading from Hebrews and referencing a hymn from the (old) Methodist Hymn Book on Jesus ‘high priest’ (number 232). I also acknowledge reliance on notes from an article by Neville Ward, origin now unknown, for this reflection.

All four gospels tell us that the appearances of the risen Jesus to the disciples came to an end. God had better things in store for us and the ascension helps us to understand and know its truth for our Christian lives. Jesus has entered the divine realm not to leave his friends and followers forever but so that he might come infinitely near to all people in every time and place and that we might come near to God.

The ascension helps us to think of God now looking at us with the face of Jesus, incarnate, crucified, and risen. Jesus has ‘entered the holy place above’ to use the words of hymn 232 in the Methodist Hymn Book; he has entered the being and glory of God. And it is the self-same Jesus born to parents too poor to ‘swing’ a hotel room, the sensitive healer who touched people’s deepest needs and raised them to wholeness, the story-teller who drew crowds and shared the good news of God’s inclusive community of love and grace but was perceived as a threat to the religious status quo, the leader who refused an army, the master who took a towel and washed his disciples’ feet, the ‘turner of the other cheek’ who forgave those who misunderstood and rejected him, the power-abnegator who gave himself even to death on a cross, who is ‘seated at the right hand of the Father’ (Nicene Creed).

 Entered the holy place above,

 Covered with meritorious scars,

 The tokens of his dying love

 Our great High-priest in glory bears;

 He pleads his passion on the tree,

 He shows himself to God for me. (MHB 232 verse 1)

The ascension helps us to understand that within the very being of God there is one who is ‘on our side’. Christ in God, is our Saviour, Friend, and Advocate (counsel for the defence). The wounds of Jesus, the ‘meritorious scars’, all that Christ suffered through human misunderstanding and ill-will, and, therefore, what God suffers through our persisting ill-will, does not put God against us. God is not set on punishing us. Rather, it is the passion of Christ brought by his ascension to God which is the continual reminder that our release from sin into love, joy, and peace is God’s eternal concern. There is in an eternal pleading in the holy place for our deliverance and joy.

 Before the throne my Saviour stands,

 My Friend and Advocate appears;

 My name is graven on his hands,

 And him the Father always hears;

 While low at Jesu's Cross I bow,

 He hears the blood of sprinkling now. (MHB verse 2)

All of us may look at life in different ways and see the life of faith differently. No two of us have the same joys, pleasures, or sense of fulfilment nor the same struggles with our past, ourselves or circumstances. Christian faith is that now, today, in the precise situation that is before us, each one of us and all of us can know God ‘on our side’. We can live in the conviction that all life is really on the side of our growth and fulfilment, our ascension to the glory of one-ness with God.

 This instant now I may receive

 The answer of his powerful prayer;

 This instant now by him I live,

 His prevalence with God declare … (MHB 232 verse 3)

And the end of all is that Presence of which our highest moments are but fugitive glimpses, our joys but a promise.

 And soon my spirit, in His hands,

 Shall stand where my Forerunner stands. (MHB 232 verse 3)

Let us, then, live in joyful assurance of God’s eternal ‘on-our-side-ness’ and, like our Friend and Saviour, risk ourselves for others in love, service, and prayer. Amen. Thanks be to God.

**Thanksgiving** (© Common Worship Times and Seasons, Extended Preface page 487 slightly adapted)

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,

always and everywhere to give you thanks,

holy father, almighty and eternal God,

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For Christ is our great high priest

who has entered once for all

into the heavenly sanctuary,

evermore to pour upon your Church

the grace and comfort of your Holy Spirit.

Christ is the one who has gone before us,

who calls us to be united in prayer

as were his disciples in the upper room

while they awaited his promised gift,

the life-giving Spirit of Pentecost.

All creation yearns with eager longing as we,

with saints and angels, sing the endless hymn of praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,**

**God of power and might,**

**Heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**The Peace**

You are invited to say the words from John’s gospel chapter 14 verses 27-28 (NRSV) and the words of the Peace below whether on your own or with another or others, mindful of all those with whom we normally share Christ’s love and peace when gathered.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.

The peace of the Lord be always with you

**and also with you.**

**A time of prayer** (trusting that others pray with us and for us)

*After each section we use the bidding and response:*

Risen and ascended Christ, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. (Romans 8:34)

Let us pray for those who hold positions of leadership and responsibility,

for all involved in government, industry, and commerce,

that their decision-making and actions

may be responsive to the widest needs

without compromise of short-termism, ideology, or personal advantage.

Let us pray for the world and all its peoples,

for those without influence, wealth or position,

that their cries for justice, mercy, and peace

may be heard and receive generous response.

Let us pray for the church throughout the world

that Christ’s generous, forgiving, self-giving, all-inclusive love may be truly ours

as we seek to share the work of the kingdom.

Let us pray for ourselves, our families, and friends,

for those who are sick in mind, body or spirit, anxious or lonely or in any kind of need, and for those bereaved,

for children soon to return to Nursery or school

and those continuing to be home-schooled,

for parents, teachers, support workers, care workers, and healthcare workers

that all may know your sustaining presence and peace.

Let us remember with thanksgiving those who have died that we with them may share the fullness of eternal joy, praying as one people in heaven and on earth as Jesus taught us,

**Our Father in heaven,**

**hallowed be your name,**

**your kingdom come, your will be done,**

**on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins**

**as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,**

**and the glory are yours**

**now and for ever. Amen.**

**Singing the Faith 297 Christ is alive**

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2JEwda8G0U>

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.

The cross stands empty to the sky.

Let streets and homes with praises ring.

Love, drowned in death, shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound

to distant years in Palestine,

but saving, healing, here and now,

and touching every place and time.

Not throned above, remotely high,

untouched, unmoved by human pains,

but daily, in the midst of life,

our Saviour with the Father reigns.

In every insult, rift, and war,

where colour, scorn or wealth divide,

Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,

and lives, where even hope has died.

Women and men, in age and youth,

can feel the Spirit, hear the call,

and find the way, the life, the truth,

revealed in Jesus, freed for all.

Christ is alive, and comes to bring

good news to this and every age,

till earth and sky and ocean ring

with joy, with justice, love, and praise.

Brian Wren (*b.* 1936)

**Blessing**

Christ, sovereign over the whole of life,

who takes our cries into the heart of God

and raises humanity to share in eternal life,

make us faithful and true to do his will;

and God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

bless us and sustain us this day and always. **Amen**.