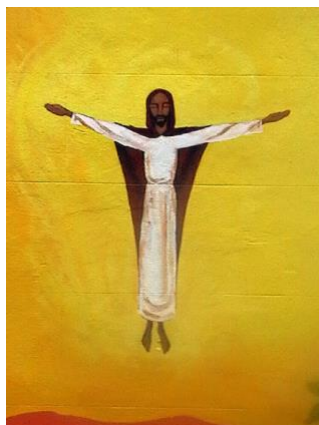


Surf Coast Uniting Churches

Sunday 17th May 2026



Introit Taizé Song – In the Lord I'll be ever thankful

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful
 in the Lord I will rejoice
 look to God, do not be afraid
 Lift up your voices, the Lord is here
 Lift up your voices, the Lord is here

Welcome

May the Worship bless you

Acknowledgement

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here. We acknowledge the Wadawurrung people, traditional custodians of this land under God.

We commit ourselves again to working for reconciliation in this land.

Call to Worship

Clap your hands, all you peoples
Shout to God with songs of joy

Prayer adoration and invocation

We give thanks and praise to God
That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, has given us a Spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know him

So that with the eyes of our hearts enlightened
We continue to perceive what is the hope to which he has called us

We give thanks and praise to God
For God's immeasurable and great power for us who believe

We praise God for putting His power to work in Jesus
Who he raised from the dead and is now ascending him to heaven

Come Holy Spirit Come
Come Holy Spirit Come

We give thanks and praise to God
Who has put all things under Jesus' feet and made him head of the His church, the body of Christ, our spiritual home, amen

Prayer of Confession and response

We are invited to bring all that's on our hearts to the Lord in this moment of silence and to ask for healing, forgiveness and the grace to forgive others.

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us
 "Our sins are forgiven"
Thanks be to God.

Hymn 717 Give thanks with a grateful heart



Give thanks with a grateful heart,
 give thanks to the Holy One,
 give thanks because he's given
 Jesus Christ his Son.

Readings

Acts 1:1-11

1:1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach
 1:2 until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

1:3 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.

1:4 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;
1:5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

1:6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

1:7 He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.

1:8 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."

1:9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

1:10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.

1:11 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."

Luke 24:44-53

24:44 Then he said to 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."

24:45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,

24:46 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

24:47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

24:48 You are witnesses of these things.

24:49 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."

24:50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them.

24:51 While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.

24:52 And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy,

24:53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Young at Heart discussion

How do you feel about the ascension?

Hymn 161 Tell out my soul

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Sermon

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen



Acts was written by Luke who gives us his account of the ascension. After Jesus ascends, we hear about two angels who stand amongst the disciples and ask them a question.

Why do you stand looking up into heaven?

I wonder what it was like to watch Jesus ascend into heaven. Perhaps Bethany on the Mount of olives is that place where Jesus' disciples saw the veil between heaven and earth opened up as Jesus ascended. Perhaps seeing him ascend helped them believe and reassured them God would send the Holy Spirit upon them, so they can continue on the ministry of Jesus.

Over the century's theologians, writers and artists have pondered what the ascension was like.

I invite you to spend time finding a photo of Salvador Dalí's painting of the ascension of Jesus, if you haven't already seen it, and to spend time pondering about it.

Dalí has offered the world an unusual interpretation of the ascension.

He said he had a cosmic dream of the ascension in 1950, and it took him eight years to capture what he saw in this painting. It is seen from the perspective of the disciples and we join them in looking at Jesus as he is ascending above us, into heaven.

Many people have tried to interpret Dalí's painting. One person said it looks like a cosmic vision, as if a beam of light is shining down upon Jesus. Another said Dalí has incorporated

the nucleus of an atom to represent the unifying spirit of God and in the atom is an image of a sunflower.

I wonder whether the sunflower has connections with Fibonacci's sequence, which concerns maths. It seems like Dali's painting combines the disciple's perspective of Christ ascending into heaven, science and mathematics and mysticism and the cosmos.

There is also a dove descending from heaven, representing the Holy Spirit and an image of Gala, Dali's wife, who may represent Mary, Jesus' mother, who is sad at His departure.

Another interpretation is the yellow circle could be the sun who gives life to earth.

Christ's feet are dirty, from many pilgrimages and journeys, connecting perhaps like our many journeys.

What grabs my attention is the hands of Christ. There is power in those hands. It's like Christ's hands hold the cosmos together and heaven and earth.



There are many ways of wondering about the ascension.

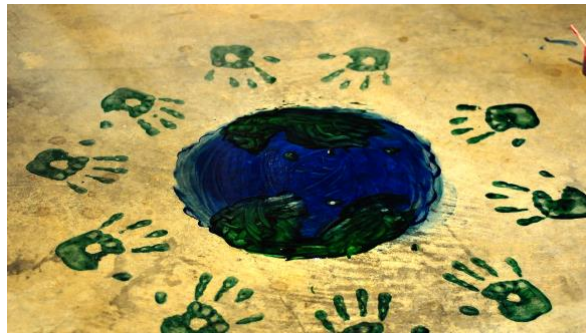
I once belonged to Templestowe Uniting and Tom Rose encouraged us to go on retreats to Pallotti College in Millgrove. A group of us would walk up to the top of a hill that overlooked a valley. We looked down into that valley as we pondered and prayed about the ascension. I led a devotion at a recent church meeting. It was about two different groups standing on a mountain and a group of people living in the valley between the two hills.

It was written by Andy Raine at an international Dance Conference in Scotland and was based on a reading from Joel. *Celtic Daily Prayer* © 2015 The Northumbria Community Trust. He said: I saw a very dark, steep cliff with a small number of people standing at a distance, close to the edge. Each of them was shouting angrily, and so they made far more noise than you'd expect from so few. One was complaining bitterly that 'They're even trying to bring religion into Christmas now' another was insisting angrily that science has replaced belief in creation and will soon be done with God altogether! Another of these people was a card-carrying Satanist. Each seemed angry and to be speaking stridently and outspokenly. At a great distance was another high hill, though its edge was not quite so steep. On the top of it were groups of Christian believers. They were facing inwards towards each other and thus preoccupied. If anything distracted them it was the voices from the far away cliff. These

Christians found the voices distressing and felt uneasy that they were perhaps ill-prepared to reply to such challenges.

In the long valley between these opposing hills, I saw a valley filled with people. These people were having profound experiences of God that affected them deeply, but they could not at first understand and were also being deeply moved by the experience of life itself. For some, a glimmer of understanding, or an unexpected joy. These people were wide open, hungry to explore their experiences, shyly willing to speak about these things with a friend, a stranger they could trust or anyone with access to wisdom... or time to listen. The believers on the hill seemed oblivious to these opportunities for friendship and the exciting glimmers and signs of the Spirit at work. If they were distracted at all it was by how to respond to those on the opposing cliff who were ironically the only people who were consistently defensive and definitely not prepared to listen.

Andy Raine's response to this situation was immediate. A compassionate desire to not waste the opportunities he could see. He said to himself, I don't know how many days or years are left to me, but I can't spend them wasting my energies up on Holy Hill. I must live my life in that valley.



I asked people at a recent church meeting to respond to this story. One person considered those on Holy Hill to be a closed community, living inward, focused on themselves and their members. That Christ is not closed in like the group on Holy Hill. Christ calls for outreach into the valleys by Christian communities. Another said, I might live on Holy Hill, but I want to live in that valley.

Where do you prefer to live?

When the angels asked the disciples: Why do you stand looking up into heaven?

they may have been trying to tell the disciples it was time to get on with it and live out their faith.

In today's gospel Jesus told his disciples to:

"Stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

He then led them to the village of Bethany on the mount of Olives, where he blessed them, then was carried up into heaven. Their response was to watch him ascend, worship him and then return to the Temple where they blessed God and shared their faith with others who were not Christians. The Temple was like the Valley.

In case you are wondering about the singing in the background, it's my neighbours. A large group of young people are staying next door and singing meaningful songs and enjoying themselves. It's not the first time. They may be a Christian group. I need to explore. We live in a valley.

Next week is Pentecost Sunday, the day we pray to receive the Holy Spirit, so we are empowered to minister in Jesus' name. It is not a one off. Receiving the Holy Spirit is a continued blessing we receive throughout our lives.

Prayer

Lord as we wait on your Spirit, we pray you may once again empower us for your continued ministry in the world. Help us find the courage to go out into the valleys where people are thirsty to know God and willing to listen. In Jesus' name, amen.

Quiet moment



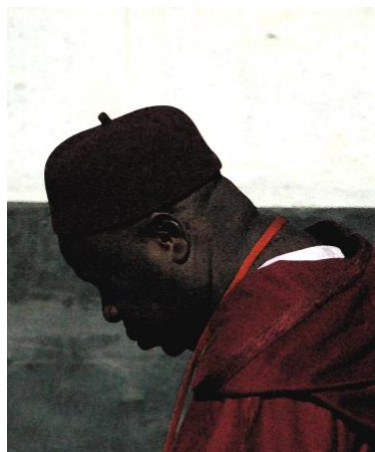
Offering

Lord, giver of every good thing, we bring to you our lives, gifts and resources for the building up of your kingdom and church.

We give thanks for blessings and transformation that come through your grace and love made known in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen

Prayers of the People

Prayers for world peace, the environment, those experiencing hunger, homelessness, poverty and suffering.



The Lord's Prayer

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.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Hymn 655 O let the Son of God enfold you

O, let the Son of God enfold you
with his Spirit and his love;
let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul;
O, let him have the things that hold you
and his Spirit, like a dove,
will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Sharing and notices

Sung Sending - Hymn 749 - Thuma Mina

Send us, Lord.

Send us, Jesus; send us, Jesus;
send us, Jesus; send us, Lord.

We will go, Lord.

We will go, Lord, we will go, Lord:
in your name, Lord, we will go.

Traditional South African

Final song – Lord I lift your name on high

Lord, I lift Your name on high
Lord, I love to sing Your praises
I'm so glad You're in my life
I'm so glad You came to save us