

Brookline Community Church

May 16, 2021

Celebrating the Feast of the Ascension

Reverend Catherine A. Merrill, Minister



Every part of worship has a video, so we've gathered them [together in a play list](#). [If you click on "Play All"](#), they'll play from the beginning of the service to the end! And you can just follow along, never clicking on another link. Or you can go through clicking on all the individual links – your choice.

Note before Worship

Before we begin today's worship, I want to thank everyone who pitched in to help cover for me during my medical leave. In going through all the regular medical tests before knee replacement surgery, my doctors wanted to run one extra last on my heart. My heart's in great shape. But there were some extra blood clots that needed additional investigation. After a bunch more tests, everything appears to be fine. My body needs a few months to adjust to my new medication before I can have my knee replaced. So it will mean some additional months of hobbling around before rescheduling the surgery. It was not what I was hoping for, but it was better we found it before anything became more dramatic.

So let me offer my thanks to everyone who pitched in to give me the time I needed. I appreciated the care you took of me.

Prelude: [*Sunday within the Octave of Ascension*](#)

[An Gregorian chant to help you get settled for worship]

Centering Ourselves for Worship:¹

[Join Susan and Russell Haight, today's lay leaders, [in our centering prayer.](#)]

Leader: Risen and ascended Christ,
you surround us with witnesses
and send us the Counselor
who opens our minds to understand your teaching.

**All: Open our minds to understand the scriptures, O God,
so that when sin cripples our hope,
we may discover the freedom of your forgiveness;.**

Leader: when suffering and death overtake our lives,
we may know the joy of the risen Christ;

**All: and when we feel abandoned,
we may comprehend the power of the promised Spirit,
through Jesus Christ our Lord**

Leader: Bless us with such grace
that our lives may become a blessing for the world

All: a blessing now, and in the age to come.

Leader: Amen.

All: Amen.

Hymn: *Lord God! To Thee Be Blessing*

[\[Click here\]](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with.

If you have a favorite hymn you'd like to include in our worship service, just send it along and I'll look for a good place for it.]

Lifting up Our Joys and Concerns:

[Rev. Cath [sharing our joys and concerns.](#)]

Let us pray for the whole world and everything in it,
for there is much need and want,
and we, the church, have been called to be
Christ's body in our world today.

**May we worship Christ,
through the joy we offer in our daily lives.**

We pray for the past and present members of the military,
and their families,
that they may know their sacrifice is seen

¹ Today's Centering Prayer and Prayer to Send Us Back out into the World were inspired by Revised Common Lectionary Prayers copyright © 2002 Consultation on Common Texts admin. Augsburg Fortress.

and honored by those they have protected
**May we worship Christ,
through the joy we offer in our daily lives.**

We pray for the ill and the abused,
and for all those who need protection and care.
We pray for those weighed down with concerns,
carrying a burden that narrows the window to joy

For Tristan Bailey, family friend of Stacey, Sue & Russell Haight's
daughter, who was murdered at age 13 by another teen

For Sierra, Candy's daughter, who's have a lump in her breast checked out

For Bert Desrochers who is currently at Mass General recovering from a
stroke

For Bob Reagan, a friend of the Razzaboni Family, who is in the hospital,
severely injured in a car accident

For Amy's Aunt Lois who is in hospice care

For friends and family of Tom McKay, that they might know the love that
surrounds them

For Ginette Greene, Jill's cousin, who continues her fight with breast
cancer

**May we worship Christ,
through the joy we offer in our daily lives.**

We pray for those lifted up with joy,
for those who show us the joy God is offering us,
For Elly Austin, whose cancer is in remission

For Vicki Goodwin, who is continuing her recovery from COVID

For the joy of returning to my church family

**May we worship Christ,
through the joy we offer in our daily lives.**

We pray for your church and
its called and elected leaders.
May we all grow in faith and love,
and know with surety
the inheritance and hope to which you have called us.

**May we worship Christ,
through the joy we offer in our daily lives.**

Holy, holy, holy God,
your power and majesty fill the universe,

far above all we see and do, measure and name.
You reign with Christ and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

[\[The Lord's Prayer\]](#)

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, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

[For next week, please feel free to send me your joys & concerns and I'll include them in our prayers: minister@bccnh.org or call/text (978) 494-6953.]

Hymn: *Clap Your Hands*

[\[Click here\]](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with.]

Scripture Reading: Luke 24:44-53

[Luke 24:44-53 [read for you](#)]

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.' 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 worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Reflection on the Scripture:

[\[The video of the reflection.\]](#)

Today's reading is the end of the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel finishes with the worship of God. And if you look all the way back to the beginning of the Gospel, it begins with worship too, with Zechariah leading worship in the Temple, struck dumb because he doubted that a child would come to an old and barren couple. Even though Zechariah was a priest, allowed into the most holy space in the Temple, he had underestimated God's interest in individual lives.

When we think of God, we think of an infinite being with great power, with perfect knowledge, with the ability to reach into the flow of history and the laws of

physics and create miracles where we don't see any possibilities. It's not hard to worship such power and such perfection. But like Zechariah, it can be hard to think that it has anything to do with us.

The end of the Gospel of Luke offers another way of framing how we think of God. Instead of only thinking about distant perfection, what about thinking of God as a being that understands grief enough to weep, hunger enough to eat, exhaustion enough to sleep?² What about thinking of God as a being who understands the relief of crying for a friend who has died, the delicious flavor of grilled fish, the peace of waking from a nap in the back of a boat. Not that we worship the ordinariness exactly, but rather worship the mercy of a God who opens our eyes to a new way of seeing God. God reveals Godself as powerful enough to accept an intimate understanding of how hard this earthly life can be. There is generosity in showing how vulnerable God is willing to be.

The Gospel also ends in a blessing and with joy. And if you look all the way back to the beginning of the Gospel, it begins with a blessing and with joy.³ Elizabeth and Zechariah, who were too old to have children are blessed by God and receive with great joy their son, John the Baptizer. Then Mary, a young, single woman, is visited by an angel who lets her know of God's blessing and the joy she is bringing into the world. It is a powerful way to frame a story that is full of death and betrayal, full of anger and rejection, full of sorrow and loss.

The end of the Gospel of Luke shows Jesus ascending to heaven blessing those who followed him. The hands that are raised in blessing still show the marks of the crucifixion. The followers who thought the last image they would have of Jesus would be dead on the cross, or wrapping his mutilated body for burial, now see him whole and alive, blessing them, as he rises. There is generosity in that gesture as well, that their last memory of him is not of their failing but of his understanding.

As Jesus rises, he makes space for what is to follow. He makes space for the Holy Spirit to minister in the world. The Holy Spirit works in the world differently than he does. Jesus works in the world differently than God does. All parts of the Trinity work, and make space for the others to do their work.⁴ Jesus is also making space for his disciples and the church to do their work, to share the blessing he has left with them, that repentance and forgiveness of sins is available to all the world (Luke 24:47).

² Mark Tranvik, "Gospel: Commentary on Luke 24:44-53", Working Preacher "Lectionary Commentaries for May 12, 2013, Ascension of Our Lord", <https://www.workingpreacher.org/?print-all=31185%2C31184%2C31183%2C31186> (accessed 10 May 2021)

³ Sarah S. Henrich, "Between Text and Sermon: Luke 24:36-53." *Interpretation* 68, no. 4 (2014): 434.

⁴ David S. Cunningham "Ascension of the Lord, Theological Perspective, Luke 24:44-53" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Volume 2*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 522.

In the end of the Gospel of Luke, we see the beginning of the church. The church is to bear witness to the power and intimacy of God. It's to bear witness to the blessing and joy that comes along with the death and rejection and loss. It's to make space so that repentance and forgiveness can happen. We do that by reflection on the Word of God, both the sacred texts of our tradition and the life changing presence of God in our lives.

I hate meeting new doctors. I feel judged because of my weight. It pushes all my buttons, so I struggle to hear them over the torrent of negative chatter in my own head. Plus, I have to listen to everything they're saying and in real time figure out if I understand what they're saying in light of my weight. The cardiologist who reads through all the reports on my heart and my blood chemistry, says everything is great, super, very healthy and tells me to lose weight. So I have to slow him down and ask how the two are related. They're not. But I could see the puzzled look on his face that I asked about an assumption he was making. The hematologist who tells me I have a genetic variation that makes my blood more likely to clot. I ask if it's related to my weight and she looks at me puzzled and says "Nope, it's been that way since you were born. It doesn't have anything to do with your weight. Why do you ask?"

Everything's fine with my health at the moment. I still need a new knee, but that has to wait a few months until my body gets used to the new medications I'm on. I feel like I've been living in a tumble dryer of emotions and scary possibilities and test after test after test. This is the first week I've been comfortable wearing short sleeves in public my arms have been so bruised and riddled with needle marks. And through all of it, I didn't binge eat, an old habit when my emotions got too big, which honestly took just about everything I had. So I was so crabby, and short tempered, I didn't want to be around myself anymore.

I didn't want to be this vulnerable. I didn't want to be this exhausted. I wanted to be strong and pulled together and charming and cheerful. I wanted to take care of other people, not be taken care of. But I am part of the church of Jesus Christ. That means stepping out of the way and letting others take care of me when I needed to be cared for. That means recognizing that having a few weeks away to ride the whirlwind of medical appointments was how you could care for me. Being a part of the church of Jesus Christ means recognizing that joy and blessing come in the middle of fear and loss and exhaustion. Or when I'm just in a really miserable mood.

So when we look at today's reading from the Gospel of Luke, when we think about the Word of God as it is offered today, I would argue that we can look at our own lives too. We can ask ourselves how we can offer our witness to our faith in Jesus Christ through his church. Where can we witness vulnerability, our own and other people's? Where can we witness blessing and joy in the midst of death, sorrow and loss? Where can we make space for something holy to do its

work? We can and should see the work of the church in what Outreach is doing in their work with Harbor Homes. In the work that the Open and Affirming team is doing to witness the variety of opinions we have in the church. But we may more fully be the church if we also look into our daily lives and see where we can offer our witness to Jesus and his church through how we live our lives. Maybe even especially when our lives aren't going the way we wanted or the way we wanted anyone to really see.

Where are you worshiping? Where is your blessing and joy? Where are you making space for the holy to do its work? That is the work of the church and we are doing it in so many other places beside this lawn.

Hymn: *Come Thou Font of Every Blessing* by Chris Rice

[\[Click here\]](#) for a video that will give you the lyrics and someone to sing with.]

Prayer of Dedication for the Gifts We've Been Given

[\[Let's pray together.\]](#)

Christ has called us to be
his witnesses to the ends of the earth.
Thus we give generously to fulfill that call.

Holy One, we clap our hands and shout for joy!
We give you praise and these offerings,
for, with Christ ascended by your side,
you are God, awesome and Most High! **Amen.**

A Prayer to Send us Back Out into the World

[\[Let's pray together.\]](#) Thanks, Susan and Russell, for being our Lay Leaders this week!]

Leader: As we head back out into the coming week, we know you surround us with witnesses and have sent us a Counselor to open our minds

All: Help us to see the witnesses and listen to the Counselor.

Leader: In the coming days we know that sin will cripple our hope,

All: Help us to discover the freedom of your forgiveness and the joy that forgiveness brings.

Leader: When suffering and death overtake our lives,

All: Help us to find the way to the joy of the risen Christ and share that joy with others.

Leader: In this coming week when we feel abandoned,

All: Help us to open ourselves to the power of the promised Spirit, Through Jesus Christ our Lord

Leader: Bless us with such grace

All: that our lives may become a blessing for the world, now and in the age to come.

Leader: Amen.

All: Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: # 839 "God Be With You Till We Meet Again; by his counsels guide, uphold you, with his sheep securely fold you; God be with you till we meet again."

[The Music Ministry crew made this bit of video for us, so we could all sing together, with each other and our former selves!]

Postlude: [The Ascension](#) by Phil Wickham

[Feel free to sing along and let it help you gear up to return to the world.]

Here ends our worship, now let our service begin.



PRAYER LIST (05/16/21)

If you know those on this list, call on them & tell them we are praying for them. If you know others who should be added to this list please give their names to the minister or a deacon.

- Friends & family of Jerry King, Tre Rouse, Tasha Feller, Pat Tiner, Terry House, Rev. Tom Atherton, June Hoff and Dave Larkin.
- Luca, Amy's nephew, as his new treatment appears to be having effect
- Those affected by the corona virus and those working to limit its impact
- Those suffering from domestic violence, who are caught at home with their abusers at a time of rising stress, that they might find safe havens.
- For everyone to stay as healthy as they can in the days to come
- For the friends & families of those who have died alone;
- For our church, that we remain patient with the process of re-opening
- For Tristan Bailey, family friend of Stacey, Sue & Russell Haight's daughter, who was murdered at age 13 by another teen
- For Sierra, Candy's daughter, who's have a lump in her breast checked out
- For Bert Desrochers who is currently at Mass General recovering from a stroke
- For Bob Reagan, a friend of the Razzaboni Family, who is in the hospital, severely injured in a car accident
- For Amy's Aunt Lois who is in hospice care
- For friends and family of Tom McKay, that they might know the love that surrounds them
- For Ginette Greene, Jill's cousin, who continues her fight with breast cancer
- For those who have no one to pray for them, accept our prayers
- Individuals serving in our military & their families

Household Prayer: Morning⁵

Holy One, come into my heart this morning and give me eyes to see throughout this day all the ways that you rule. Put your resurrecting power to work in my life and empower me to be a witness to Christ, that my life may be a song of thanksgiving to you. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

God, embrace me now at the end of this day. As in every day, there have been ups and downs, joys and disappointments. I thank you for my faith that, above it all, you rule. I put my trust in you as I give this day, now spent, to you. Do with it what you will, and send your Holy Spirit to pull forward threads from today that you will spin into good things tomorrow. I pray through Jesus Christ, who reigns with you, now and forever. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

The Ascension of Christ to be seated at the right hand of God is a grand liturgical celebration in the life of the church. It marks forty days of celebrating Easter and God's triumph over the powers of oppression, depression, and our fear of death through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is one of many images we have for Christ: good shepherd, suffering servant, great physician. How does the image of the ascended Christ affect your understanding of who he is? What are the strengths and weaknesses in this image of Christ for you?

Daily Awareness Reflection⁶

At the end of the day, I've been asking myself the following questions. I jot down the answers and ask them again the next evening. I've found it helps me to remain centered as well as increasing my awareness of God in my life. It takes about 10 minutes.

1. Slow down. Stop. Prepare yourself to pray by becoming aware of the love with which God looks on you ...
2. Note the gifts God has given you today. Give thanks to God for them ...
3. Ask God that this be a time of special grace and revelation ...
4. With God, review the day. Look at the stirrings of your heart, your thoughts, and your choices as the day progressed. Which have been of God? Which have not? What does God want to say to you about both? ...
5. Ask for forgiveness for failures/omissions, for healing from their effects ...
6. Look forward to the following day, and plan concretely with God how to live it according to God's desire for your life ...

⁵ The Morning & Evening Prayer and Question for Reflection are reprinted by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2014.

⁶ Elizabeth Liebert, *The Soul of Discernment* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2015), 31.

Announcements:

The church's financial obligations continue. If you are able, please mail your offering to: Brookline Community Church, PO Box 507, Brookline, NH 03033.

	Actual Income	Actual Expenses	Income vs. Expenses +/-
April	\$30,585	\$28,963	\$1,622

Please shop smile.amazon.com and choose Brookline Community Church as your charity to support the church. Thanks!

You can now use the Amazon Shopping app on your phone and still support the church through the Smile program.

How it works:

1. Open the Amazon app on your phone
2. Select the main menu (=) & tap on "AmazonSmile" within Programs & Features
3. Select "Church of Christ" as your charity
4. Follow the on-screen instructions to activate AmazonSmile in the app

Town Working Group to Increase Citizen Engagement

The Selectboard is seeking residents interested in serving on a working group that will identify ways to improve the dissemination of town information to residents and enhance citizen engagement. The working group's work will be completed by the end of the summer. This is a great opportunity to learn more about how your town operates and to identify ideas for improvement.

If interested, please send an email expressing your interest to Town Administrator Tad Putney at tputney@brooklinenh.us no later than noon on Friday, May 14th.

May is Military Appreciation Month

Please say a prayer for our past or present service men & women and their families for their sacrifices in serving our country. Outreach would also like to bring attention to our veterans and their families who may be struggling at this time with homelessness, finding a job, physical or mental health issues. Harbor Care in Nashua provides supportive services, reintegration programs and transitional housing for homeless veterans and their families.

From May 1st thru May 21st Outreach will be collecting:

- NEW twin size sheet sets, blankets & pillows (they cannot accept any used items)
- Walmart Gift Cards (they cannot accept any clothing items)
- Uber Gift Cards (Transportation to job interviews or places of employment)

You may place these items anytime in the plastic bin outside the church by the side door or drop off in person on Saturday May 15th between 9:00am-12:00pm or Friday May 21st between 1:00pm-5:00pm.

If you would like to make a monetary donation to buy bedding or gift cards you can mail a check to the Brookline Community Church, PO Box 507, Brookline NH 03033 and note that this is for the Veteran's Drive.

Brookline Food Pantry

Although we cannot be together physically at this time, Outreach is continuing to work with Rebecca Purdin through the Brookline Welfare office & CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) to address our community's needs.

The Brookline food pantry is now open on Tuesdays & Thursdays from 10-2:00 for drop-offs only. There is a list on the [Brookline Food Pantry's Facebook page](#) that is being updated as items are needed. In addition to Market Basket gift cards, this week, they're looking for:

Pickles	Apple or Cranberry Juice
Parmesan	Paper Towels
Cookies/Cookie Mix	Coffee
Cheese Nip (or similar) Crackers	Disposable Razors
Jello/Gelatin (any flavors)	Dry Cat Food
Sardines	Dry Dog Food
Cereal (especially Raisin Bran or "Fun" Cereals)	Dish Soap
	Zip-style Bags

If you know of anyone who could use some help from the Food Pantry, please let Rebecca or Amy know. We sense there's more need in the community than is currently picking up food.

Non-perishables can be dropped off at Brookline Town Hall (downstairs near the Town Clerk's Office), at the Brookline Post Office, or at the Cozy Tae Cart any time those places are open.

As always, perishable items such as bread, cheese, butter, eggs, meats, and milk can be donated during open pantry hours: Tues and Thurs, 10am - 2pm.

Thank you for your continued support to our church and our community.

Greetings from the Open and Affirming Team

It has been over a year since we began the stay at home precautions due to Covid. We have greatly missed our church family. Last year we had just started to have conversations with our fellow members to listen to your thoughts and concerns around the Open and Affirming process. Due to Covid, we were not able to continue the one to one conversations, and we stopped our team meetings as well. We have recently started to meet again as a team and are hoping to resume the one to one conversations with our fellow members. We will

be reaching out to all members of the congregation throughout the spring and summer.

However, to help facilitate questions and suggestions we have also created a question box to gather any questions or suggestions you may have. It is located on the table in the upstairs hall as you enter the sanctuary. In addition, we welcome your comments via email onacommittee@bccnh.org or post. These can be addressed to ONA c/o Brookline Community Church, 2 Main Street, Brookline, NH 03033. This will help us to facilitate conversations and will help us through the process.

We look forward to our conversations as we thoughtfully explore the process of Open and Affirming together.

Best Wishes,

The Open and Affirming Committee

Melanie Levesque, Lindsey Shaklee, Yi-Fan Kang, Erin Sawicki, Jill Aitken

Covid-19 Scams Targeting Seniors

The [NH Attorney General's office put out a press release](#) describing several scams that are targeting seniors. The claims range from needing personal information to get their Social Security payments, to being family members in need of cash to treat Covid-19 symptoms, to offers of fake medical products to prevent Covid-19, to needing personal information to get their stimulus checks, to fake charities. (Honestly, what are people like?!?). Please pass the word.

Covid-19 Information

If people want to know the latest status of Covid-19 in NH and the Emergency orders to date, go to <https://www.nh.gov/covid19/>

Help Lines

This time of isolation can be very difficult. You may know someone who needs some support beyond what you can provide. We're in this together.

- Suicide prevention: 1-800-273-8255
- Sexual assault: 1-800-656-4673
- Domestic violence: 1-800-799-7233