



# Seventh Sunday of Easter

MAY 17, 2026

*Between Ascension and Pentecost, the risen Christ teaches his disciples to stop staring at the sky, gather in prayer, endure suffering with hope, and live as witnesses held in his own prayer to the Father.*

FIRST READING

Acts 1:6-14

PSALM

Psalm 68:1-10,33-36

SECOND READING

1 Peter 4:12-14,5:6-11

GOSPEL

John 17:1-11

## Before You Hear the Readings

The Seventh Sunday of Easter often feels like a threshold. Easter joy is still bright, but the risen Jesus is no longer simply appearing in the familiar way. The disciples stand between presence and promise, between what they have seen and what they have not yet received. That is a deeply recognizable place for Christian life: knowing enough to trust, but not enough to control what comes next.

Listen for the movement from looking upward to praying together, from anxiety about timing to patient witness, from suffering as bewilderment to suffering held within Christ's glory. These readings do not offer a strategy for mastering the future. They offer a pattern for waiting faithfully: worship, prayer, unity, courage, and the Spirit's promised power.

## The Lectionary Thread

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Acts begins with a question about the restoration of Israel's kingdom. The disciples are not asking a foolish question; they are asking a biblical one, full of longing for God to set things right. Jesus does not scold their hope, but he reorders it. They are not given a timetable. They are given a vocation: to receive the Holy Spirit and bear witness from Jerusalem outward to the ends of the earth. Ascension is not Christ's absence as abandonment; it is the beginning of a mission that will be empowered from beyond them.

Psalm 68 gives the assembly language large enough for that moment. God rises, rides upon the clouds, scatters what destroys, and provides for orphans, widows, prisoners, the desolate, and the needy. The psalm refuses to separate divine majesty from divine mercy. The God enthroned in glory is also the God who gives the vulnerable a home. So when Acts speaks of Jesus being lifted up in a cloud, the psalm helps us hear that image not as escape from earth, but as the enthronement of the One whose reign brings rescue.

First Peter then speaks to a community discovering that witness may bring pain. The fiery ordeal is not romanticized, and revilement is not called good in itself. But suffering for the name of Christ is placed inside the larger reality of sharing his life. Glory is not merely future decoration; the Spirit of glory rests even now upon those who belong to Christ. The baptized are not asked to seek hardship, but they are invited not to be undone by it.

The Gospel gathers the whole movement into Jesus' prayer. Before his arrest, and in John's Gospel before the cross is fully unveiled as glory, Jesus looks to the Father and prays for those who will remain in the world. He does not ask that they be made impressive, safe, or dominant. He asks that they be protected in the Father's name and made one. The ascended Lord who sends witnesses is also the praying Lord who holds them before God.

# The Readings Broken Open

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## FIRST READING

Acts 1 stands at the hinge between Luke's Gospel and the life of the apostolic community. The disciples have lived through crucifixion, resurrection appearances, and instruction from the risen Jesus. Their question about the kingdom belongs to Israel's long hope for God's justice, liberation, and covenant faithfulness. Jesus does not erase that hope; he widens its horizon and refuses to let them possess the calendar of God.

The Ascension is sometimes misunderstood as Jesus going away to a distant heaven. In Luke-Acts, it is better understood as exaltation and enthronement. The cloud is biblical language for divine presence, not mere weather. Jesus is taken into God's own glory, and from that place of authority he will pour out the Spirit. His lordship is not less real because the disciples cannot see him as they did before.

The two figures in white robes redirect the disciples' attention. Their gaze must not become nostalgia, speculation, or spiritual paralysis. They are to return to Jerusalem, wait, pray, and be ready for the Spirit's power. The first act of the post-Ascension community is not planning, branding, or conquering; it is common prayer.

The list of those gathered matters. The apostles are named, but so are women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus' brothers. The witness that will go to the ends of the earth begins in an upstairs room with a praying, mixed, reconciled company. In Anglican terms, this is a profoundly ecclesial scene: a community formed by Word, promise, and prayer before it is sent into public witness.

## PSALM

Psalm 68 is a psalm of praise with a fierce edge. It asks God to rise up and drive away wickedness, then immediately turns to joy, song, and the care of those most easily forgotten. The congregation is given permission to want evil scattered and the vulnerable sheltered. This is not polite religious sentiment; it is worship shaped by the conviction that God's reign changes the conditions of the world.

The psalm's imagery is grand: God rides upon the clouds, the earth quakes, the heavens pour down rain, and Sinai trembles. Yet the grandeur is never abstract. The One who shakes the wilderness is father of orphans, protector of widows, home-maker for the desolate, liberator of prisoners, and provider for the needy. Praise becomes truthful when it joins awe before God's majesty to trust in God's mercy.

On this Sunday after the Ascension, the cloud imagery resonates strongly with Acts. The psalm helps worshipers sing the Ascension as enthronement: Christ is lifted into the mystery of God's rule. But it also guards against a heavenly vision detached from earthly suffering. If the exalted Lord shares the life and rule of Israel's God, then his glory is inseparable from the care of those without power.

Prayed in parish worship, this psalm can stretch the heart. It invites jubilant confidence without denying conflict, and it teaches the baptized to ask for deliverance not only for themselves but for all who need shelter, freedom, rain, and restoration.

#### EPISTLE

First Peter addresses believers who are learning that Christian identity can bring social cost. The language of a fiery ordeal suggests pressure, testing, and public hostility. The apostle's first pastoral counsel is, in effect, do not be bewildered. Hardship does not mean Christ has failed them or that the Spirit has departed. Their suffering is interpreted in relation to Christ's own suffering and promised glory.

This passage must be handled carefully. It does not bless abuse, excuse cruelty, or tell people to remain in harm's way when protection is needed. It speaks specifically of suffering endured because of allegiance to Christ. The point is not that pain is holy by itself, but that union with Christ is strong enough to hold believers even when faithfulness is costly.

The surprising word is blessing. To be reviled for the name of Christ is to discover that the Spirit of glory rests upon the community. That does not always feel glorious. It may feel like weakness, marginality, or exhaustion. But apostolic faith sees a deeper reality: those who bear Christ's name are not abandoned in the moment of trial.

For a worshiping congregation, this is not merely advice for heroic individuals. It forms a shared imagination. When one member suffers for truth, mercy, justice, or fidelity to the Gospel, the

whole parish is called to stand near, pray, encourage, and remember that Christian witness is sustained by the Spirit, not by human toughness.

#### GOSPEL

John 17 brings us into Jesus' prayer on the night before his death. The language of glory can sound strange if we hear it as triumph detached from the cross. In John's Gospel, glory is the radiant self-giving love of the Son who completes the Father's work. The hour has come, and that hour includes betrayal, suffering, death, resurrection, and return to the Father. Glory is not an escape from love's cost; it is love revealed to the end.

Jesus defines eternal life not first as duration, but as knowledge: to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom God has sent. This is relational, covenantal, and participatory. Eternal life begins now as communion with God through the Son. It is the life into which the baptized are drawn in worship, prayer, and sacramental belonging.

The most tender part of the passage is that Jesus prays for his own. He knows he is going to the Father, and he knows they will remain in the world. The disciples are not removed from danger, confusion, or conflict. Instead, they are entrusted to the Father's protection and gathered into the unity shared by Father and Son.

This is the good news at the hinge of the Sunday: the mission of witness does not begin with human confidence, and the unity of believers does not depend on shared temperament or natural agreement. Jesus himself prays us into faithfulness. The gathered assembly hears not only a command to be one, but the intercession of Christ making that unity possible.

## Hearing It Fresh

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If you are new to these readings, notice how often people are looking for certainty. The disciples want to know when God will fix everything. Believers in First Peter want to understand why following Jesus can be hard. Jesus' friends are about to face life without his visible presence. None of these longings is dismissed. Scripture treats them as real human cries.

What changes is where trust is placed. Jesus does not give a date, a map, or a guarantee of ease. He promises the Holy Spirit, gathers his friends in prayer, and prays to the Father for their

protection and unity. You do not have to understand every image of clouds, glory, or kingdom to hear the invitation: when you cannot control the future, you can still belong to Christ, pray with others, and take the next faithful step.

## Going Deeper

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The Ascension can challenge modern imagination because it is easy to picture it as a physical departure into outer space. The biblical imagination is working differently. Heaven is not simply a location above the clouds; it is God's dimension of rule, presence, and authority. To say that Jesus is lifted up and hidden by the cloud is to say that the crucified and risen one now shares fully in God's reign. In the creeds and in the Book of Common Prayer, this is why Ascension belongs with resurrection and session: Christ is risen, ascended, and reigning.

There is also a tension in Acts between Israel's hope and the mission to the nations. Jesus does not reject the restoration of Israel, but he refuses a narrow or politically controllable version of it. The Spirit-driven witness will begin in Jerusalem, move through Judea and Samaria, and extend to the ends of the earth. This is not a replacement of Israel by a Gentile church, but the widening of God's covenant blessing in the risen Messiah. The parish that hears Acts in Eastertide is being asked to imagine mission as participation in that widening mercy.

John 17 has often been called the high priestly prayer of Jesus. The title is not in the text, but it captures something true: Jesus intercedes. His prayer for unity is not generic friendliness. It is rooted in the mutual belonging of Father and Son: "all mine are yours, and yours are mine." Christian unity, then, is theological before it is institutional or emotional. It is gift, calling, discipline, and witness. In Anglican life, that unity is continually practiced through common prayer, shared Scripture, Eucharistic fellowship, and the patient work of reconciliation.

First Peter complicates any easy Easter triumphalism. Resurrection does not remove believers from history's pressures. Instead, Easter creates a people who can suffer without believing suffering has the final word. The Spirit of glory rests on those who bear Christ's name, not because they are strong, but because they are joined to the risen and ascended Lord whose prayer surrounds them.

## For Young Listeners

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Today we hear that Jesus' friends watched him go to be with God, and they did not know exactly what would happen next. They wanted answers, but Jesus gave them a promise: the Holy Spirit would help them. So they went home, stayed together, and prayed. Sometimes we also have to wait and we do not know what will come next. Jesus does not leave us alone in that waiting. He gives us people to pray with, courage for the next step, and his love that stays with us wherever we go.