



The **Methodist** Church

# CHAPLAINCY EVERYWHERE



SESSION THREE

## The Spirit of Chaplaincy

The ascension of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost give birth to the Church as both a recipient and collaborator in God's mission. This session explores some of the chaplaincy themes we observe as the Early Church, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, continued the ministry of Jesus in the world.

# Welcome

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The previous session focused upon Jesus Christ: his earthly life, death and resurrection. We cannot hope to express how significant Jesus is – the life of the universe turns around him! Our only credible response is worship: giving glory to God by living a life marked by sacrificial love.

In this session we are going to look at Christ's ascension and how the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost enabled God's mission to go global through people like us! We will also think about how the future shapes us.

This session continues to form a biblical framework for mission expressed as chaplaincy. Once again, there is much to consider, but this necessary work at the beginning will give us greater flexibility as we seek to respond with care and consideration to our local community through chaplaincy.

## Opening Prayer

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Take a few moments to focus upon God as Maker, Word and Spirit. You might find it helpful to light a candle or play some music. At an appropriate time, say together the words of the following prayer.

**Maker, Word and Spirit, you involve us in your life together. You came to us to draw us away from our isolation and into your communion.**

**In your earthly life you showed us what 'normal' looks like. In your painful death you demonstrated the extent of your love. In your physical resurrection you conquered death.**

**As we consider deep things: of glory, power and our future hope, we ask that you will help us to find our place in your story of redemption. May we hear your call to go, knowing that you go with us, making all things new.**

**Amen.**

# 40 Days



“Dear Theophilus, in the first volume of this book I wrote on everything that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he said good-bye to the apostles, the ones he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. After his death, he presented himself alive to them in many different settings over a period of forty days. In face-to-face meetings, he talked to them about things concerning the kingdom of God. As they met and ate meals together, he told them that they were on no account to leave Jerusalem but ‘must wait for what the Father promised: the promise you heard from me. John baptized in water; you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. And soon.”

Acts 1:1-5 (*The Message*)

Some of the Gospel accounts might give the impression that, after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples a few times and then almost immediately ascended to the right hand of God the Father. Yet Luke tells us a different story, that Jesus spent forty days after the resurrection with his disciples; that’s nearly six whole weeks! We rarely give attention to the significance of that time, but it is important to reflect upon what it might have actually been like to be with the resurrected Jesus – the firstborn from among the dead.

## Spending time with the risen Christ



Spend a few minutes as a group reflecting on what it might have been like to spend time with Jesus Christ during those 40 days.

- Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God, as he had done during the three years prior to his death. How might hearing the **risen** Christ speak about the kingdom of God change things?
- Jesus’ resurrection was substantive. He wasn’t a ghost! Jesus ate food with his disciples. What does this tell you about our future with Christ?

**Bible reading:** Luke 24:36-42



# The kingdom of God



“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’”

Mark 1:14-15 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The kingdom of God was the focus of Jesus’ attention, from the very beginning of his earthly ministry right until the end.

Mark 1:14-15 tells us that Jesus proclaimed that the reign of God had come near. As we saw in the last session, Jesus presented the kingdom through his words and deeds, but perhaps more importantly, Jesus embodied the kingdom; he brought the kingdom through his physical presence.

We could spend many sessions looking at the reign of God: the span of its influence literally engulfs the universe. Yet so often we struggle to understand exactly what it is. Jesus spoke about the kingdom using parables: the kingdom is like a pearl of great price or a mustard seed. Jesus told us that the kingdom is for those who become like little children, in other words, for those who have complete trust in God. The kingdom is demonstrated as the lame walk and the blind see. The kingdom is experienced as Jesus takes a boy’s picnic of bread and fish and feeds a multitude. But, for all of the stories and signs, God’s reign can still confound us!

During this study we will hopefully get a clearer picture of the reign of God and how chaplaincy finds itself participating in its ever-expanding life.

The reign of God speaks of the arena of God’s specific activity. It exists wherever people live under and experience God’s reign: living according to his values of love, compassion, justice and peace. Throughout his ministry, the reign of God was present in and through Jesus. The disciples experienced the kingdom through Jesus. Crowds experienced the kingdom through Jesus’ words and actions as he taught them, healed them and worked miracles. You might say that, during his time on earth, the kingdom was localised in Jesus. However, in order for God’s reign to transform everyone and everything, Jesus had to go.

# The ascension



The ascension of Jesus Christ is of great significance for our thoughts about God’s mission, particularly as it is expressed through chaplaincy. At the end of those 40 days, having eaten with his disciples and talked about the kingdom of God, Jesus leaves.

**Bible reading:** Acts 1:6-11

# What is going on?



Use the following link to search Google for images of the sculpture found in the Chapel of the Ascension (Walsingham):

[www.google.com/search?q=chapel+of+the+ascension+walsingham](http://www.google.com/search?q=chapel+of+the+ascension+walsingham)

Use one of these images to answer these questions:

- What does this image say of the ascension?



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- How far does this image reflect what you've read in the Bible passage?

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- Imagine you are there with the disciples at the ascension, what are you thinking and feeling?  
What next?

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# Enthronement



The account of the ascension in Acts 1 speaks about Jesus being carried away into heaven. However, this is not a story about Jesus leaving his disciples on their own to fend for themselves. Instead it is a story about Jesus being enthroned at the right hand of the Father so that he may send the Holy Spirit: the promise of the Father. While Jesus was upon the earth, God’s reign was localised through him, now that Jesus has gone, God’s reign can spread through the earth as the Holy Spirit comes.

**Bible reading:** Philippians 2:1-11



Philippians 2 speaks of the eternal Son emptying himself, becoming a servant of all and becoming obedient to death on a cross. These powerful and moving words say so much about the power of Christ’s humility and vulnerability and how Christ’s sacrificial love conquered death. Philippians 2 then goes on to speak about the ascension of Christ in the most glorious way.



Jesus is enthroned above every other ruler and authority. He is not given just any name, but The Name that is above every other name. The ascended Christ is all powerful, he has the ultimate authority. Ascension speaks of Christ’s power, he is the king of the kingdom of God, the Lord of heaven and earth and he commands the resources of the kingdom to reshape and renew the world.

# Chaplains serve a powerful Saviour



In your groups answer the following questions:

- Thinking about humble confidence in God’s reign, what might a chaplain believe?

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- How might this affect what they say and do?

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# Pentecost



Pentecost means 50th day and falls 50 days after Easter. Easter falls over the Jewish feast of Passover, which is the celebration of the Exodus, when God freed the Israelites from the harsh oppression of Egypt. Easter signifies the power of the cross to liberate and free humankind from sin and death: a new Exodus! Pentecost falls during the Jewish festival of Shavout, when God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, fifty days after the Exodus. Pentecost is a new Sinai experience; the law is no longer written on tablets of stone but upon hearts of flesh. This is the law of love for God and one another. The Holy Spirit descending upon the disciples in tongues of fire is incredibly significant!

**Bible reading:** Acts 2:1-14



Having obeyed Jesus' command to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit ten days earlier, the believers gathered together and waited for the Holy Spirit to come. The result was amazing; the contrast between the disciples before and after Pentecost is notable, the Spirit transformed the believers.



## In ways people can understand

The Spirit came upon the disciples and they started speaking in various tongues so that people from the gathered nations could understand their witness to the risen Christ. Likewise, the Spirit enables followers of Jesus to communicate with people in ways they can understand. It is said that chaplaincy is the ultimate responsive ministry. The Holy Spirit enables chaplains to respond in ways that make sense to people in their various situations and places.

We can often use terms that aren't understood by those who have little experience of church. These terms are often unhelpful in trying to authentically connect with those who aren't 'churched'. Most groups and organisations have their own 'jargon' and it's important to think about how we use our language.

The following video shows how corporate jargon might be used in an inappropriate way: <https://youtu.be/nqHlgzC14v4>

- What are some examples of language we use that might not be understood by those who are 'unchurched'?



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## Helping people make sense of situations

We also notice that the crowds were obviously very surprised at the affect that the Holy Spirit had upon the believers. The text says that “All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (verse 12). They needed help to make sense of the situation. Peter then began to explain, enabling them to understand. As we noted in the previous session, chaplains can help to bring understanding.



## The Spirit of mission

A missiologist called Leslie Newbiggin spoke about the mission of the Church in the pages of the New Testament resembling the fallout from a vast explosion. However, the explosion does not maim and harm but is instead life-giving! This explosion of life and joy describes what happened as the Spirit came at Pentecost.

Not only that, but Pentecost signifies the birth of the Church as both the recipient of and collaborator in God’s mission to heal and renew. The ascended Christ is now present with the believers through the presence of his Holy Spirit and this active presence makes all the difference in the lives of the disciples. We are told that on the day of Pentecost, 3000 people were drawn into God’s kingdom and were baptised because of the witness of the believers. The Church was born in mission and subsequently the mission grows the Church.

## As Jesus promised

Jesus told his disciples just before he ascended to wait for the Spirit. He also said that they would be witnesses to the ends of the earth. When the Holy Spirit came, the disciples were propelled outwards, taking the kingdom to the far reaches of human civilisation. This sent status is essential to the understanding of what it means to be God’s people. Chaplains are sent: examples of God’s radical mission.

## The Spirit as the life of the kingdom

The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus Christ’s life and ministry. The Holy Spirit can therefore be said to bring the life of God’s kingdom. Not only that, but we see that the Spirit of the Father is the Spirit of the Son. Now that the Holy Spirit is within Christ’s followers, it means that the Spirit brings about the life of Christ within us. This means that the characteristics of the Father and the Son grow within us. This transformative power is the work of sanctification, a process that will last a lifetime. God’s outrageous vision is re-creation everywhere and it comes as his people, filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, collaborate with him to spread the kingdom.



The Church then, the people of God, as seen in the book of Acts, might be thought of as being a performance of the Spirit! The Church is supposed to be the clearest, most beautiful example of God’s rule in the world. The body of Christ is the voice, hands and feet of Jesus to others. What an incredible witness we are called to be!

# The Spirit of chaplaincy



The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the believers at Pentecost begins a new era: the era of the Church in the world. Their story is our story as we too are called to be filled with the Holy Spirit and become caught up in God's mission to us and through us. Spend some time talking together about the following themes.

- Do you think of yourself as being called and sent?

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- What keeps you from going?

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- Do you think of yourself as being a witness to the risen Christ? How does that make you feel? Explain the reasons you give.

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## Our future life in God's kingdom



In God's creation, the future is not something that is static and perfect, but something that is full of potential and hurtling towards us in every moment. The kingdom of God is the presence of the future. When we pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven," we are literally inviting God's good future to flow into our present to transform it. Understood like that, the Lord's Prayer ceases to become an overfamiliar prayer that we recite week by week and instead becomes a revolutionary act. It is truly the radical prayer that Jesus taught us and when we pray it, as he did, we usher in God's revolution!

It was Annie Dillard who said that we should all be wearing crash helmets to church! As we have seen in this session, the Holy Spirit, as the impetus for mission, brings radical change to the world, starting with us and then working through us towards everything else, to the ends of the earth. The kingdom of God brings deep transformation as his mission to renew effectively re-shapes our reality! Whoever said mission was dull? The impact of this kind of life may be explosive, however, it is important to remember that its practice is often ordinary: it's about connecting with people, and bringing God's Spirit into the everyday.

## What does our future look like?

The last chapters of Revelation tell us something of what God's future is like.

**Bible reading:** Revelation 21:1-5

This is a glorious image of the future: where creation is healed, every tear is wiped away and death is no more. Here, the kingdom has come in its fullness. God is fully present with us and we will walk with him again as it was meant to be in the beginning. The future is a renewed creation – healed, redeemed and restored. In short, it is the restoration of all things. As we continue through Revelation, we read the following:

"Then the Angel showed me Water-of-Life River, crystal bright. It flowed from the Throne of God and the Lamb, right down the middle of the street. The Tree of Life was planted on each side of the River, producing twelve kinds of fruit, a ripe fruit each month. The leaves of the Tree are for healing the nations. Never again will anything be cursed. The Throne of God and of the Lamb is at the center. His servants will offer God service – worshipping, they'll look on his face, their foreheads mirroring God. Never again will there be any night. No one will need lamplight or sunlight. The shining of God, the Master, is all the light anyone needs. And they will rule with him age after age after age."

Revelation 22:1-5 (*The Message*)



# Chaplaincy Between the Times



Of course, this glorious future is not our daily experience now. We live in a world which is caught between the times. Because of Christ's life, death, resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Spirit, the kingdom is experienced in part. God is with us and actively involved in our renewal. However, the 'not yet' part means that we still experience pain and hardship, suffering and death. We are aware that the world is not as it should be.

Chaplains are acutely aware of this reality, often because the places they work in are places where these struggles are all too obvious. In hospitals among the sick and dying, in prisons, in the arenas of war and every other place where people gather. However, chaplains see a future and a present that is different; they carry a deep hope that God's future can transform the present, that God's kingdom can transform the moment. That hope not only shapes our work but changes everything about our expectations of what can happen as we collaborate with God in God's mission.

## A hope and a future



Spend some time together talking about what you have just thought about.

- Do you think of Jesus as a revolutionary leader?

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- How might chaplaincy bring God's revolution of peace, justice and healing?

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- How does chaplaincy begin to build bridges between the vision of God's kingdom and how the world is now? How might that change your behaviour?

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# Conclusions

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We have seen that God's mission is ultimately about the restoration of all things. God's good future compels us to live hopeful lives regardless of the current situation. Not only that, but God's love is demonstrated through the witness of a community, the Church, that is propelled outwards throughout the earth.

Therefore, everything we do is for the sake of the kingdom, which is transforming the world. Chaplaincy finds itself on the forefront of that change, on the cutting edge of God's kingdom, sometimes in unlikely places. In summary:

- The kingdom of God was the focus of Jesus' attention, from the very beginning of his earthly ministry until the end. It is our focus too. The Christian life is about allowing Jesus to be the Lord of our lives.
- The ascension is about Jesus' enthronement as king of the kingdom. Chaplains serve under his authority.
- The coming of the Holy Spirit empowers people to be citizens of God's kingdom and to continue the ministry of Jesus throughout the world.
- Chaplains anchor their hope in God's good future, constantly inviting it to transform the present.

The scope and potential of chaplaincy everywhere is truly exciting! In the weeks to come, we will apply all that we have thought about in the first three sessions as we get into the details of what chaplains do. We will also consider where God might be calling us to work in our own communities. Be open to God's call to go in the coming weeks.

# Prayers and Dismissal

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Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are asking that heaven will touch earth: that the future will flow into the present; that the kingdom of God, his rule and reign, will be the dominant kingdom in our lives; and that God's presence will pervade our reality and the reality of every other living thing. It really is that powerful, that significant, that transformative!

Too often, overfamiliarity breeds complacency; we miss the power in the familiar. This week, we will use a version of the Lord's Prayer written by Dallas Willard that is anything but familiar!

**Dear Father always near us, may your name be treasured and loved,  
may your rule be completed in us –  
may your will be done here on earth in just the way it is done in heaven.  
Give us today the things we need today,  
and forgive us our sins and impositions on you  
as we are forgiving all who in any way offend us.  
Please don't put us through trials, but deliver us from everything bad.  
Because you are the one in charge, and you have all the power,  
and the glory too is all yours – forever –  
which is just the way we want it!  
Amen.**

**Go from here, acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all creation.  
Go from here, in the joy and power of the Spirit.  
Go from here, to the ends of the earth, as witnesses to Christ's love.  
Go from here, knowing that you are a co-conspirator in God's revolution.  
Go from here, inviting God's good future into every part of your lives.  
Let God transform you and shape each moment of your lives.  
For his praise and to his glory.  
Amen.**

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*Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Annie Dillard (HarperPerennial, 1988)

Lord's Prayer quoted from: *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, Dallas Willard (HarperOne 1998)