

# CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	14 May 2026
Service:	Eucharist, Ascension Day
Preacher:	The Revd Jessica Reid, Rural Dean of Westbourne

I rather envy people with a good sense of cardinal direction, because I'm the kind of person who can stand on the seashore and wonder which way South is. I learn routes and pathways by memory, like scripture, anchoring them around distinctive markers so that I can pass by them in my mind's eye and re-orientate myself. In the novel *Impossible Creatures*, Mal the protagonist with an even more impoverished sense of direction possess instead a Casapasaran, a compass that always points home. Reading it aloud to my children, it occurred to that in this city, it is to the Cathedral I turn. It peeks between rooftops of Whyke, or comes suddenly into sight as you walk from Apuldram to Fishbourne over the marshes. When we go walking in the Downs, we point to the Cathedral's spire, emerging casapasaran like below us, to find the city – "Look, there's home."

In the well trodden path of the Christian year, with its waymarkers of fast and feast, the Ascension is the feast that points us home, but not in the way a casual reader might expect, because it does not point us up or away from the reality in which we live. In a faith full of paradoxes - divinity incarnate in humanity, strength seen most clearly in weakness, defeat that is victory - the Ascension of Christ into heaven to sit at the Father's right hand, teaches us that our home is in heaven, where Christ is, but because heaven is where Christ is, we are charged with making that home and discovering that home here in this damaged created order, because the Ascension is not the going away of Jesus: the Ascension is what will ensure the gift of the fullness of him who fills all in all; his presence

with us in our life and worship through the Holy Spirit whom the Father sends to us.

We are not to look up and away from the home we have already, Scripture is explicit on this point. Not only in the oft quoted men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards Heaven, but in every word of Christ's final teaching to his disciples. In Acts and in Luke the emphasis is clear: the disciples are not abandoned, they have been witnesses to the truth of who Jesus is, to his life and death willed in harmony with the Father's love, and they are to remain in Jerusalem, waiting on the promise of the Father which will come. It is in the city, not on the mountain top or among the clouds, that the Holy Spirit will descend on them and fill them with the fullness of life which, before now, they have only ever experienced when Jesus is physically alongside them.

Jesus' return to the bosom of the Father is the great act of revelation which teaches us that part of our faith which is most essential and easiest to lose sight of or feel farthest from: that we live and move and have our being in the heart of the very being of God, that in our every moment we are caught up in the same act of creation with which the stars sang at the beginning of all things, that in every moment we are formed and shaped by the outpouring of love which overcomes evil in the cross, that in every moment we can know the hope to which He has called us.

Ascension is a feast which demands of us an unceasing share in the ordinary life of the place where we live. When Jesus, who made his home among us in our humanity, takes our humanity into heaven, he proclaims our every moment worthy of divine life, if we could but see it, if we could but ask the Holy Spirit wholeheartedly to hallow every moment and us with it. The Ascension insists that it is not up and away from our reality where Jesus choses to meet us still, but in our reality and so there is heaven and home to be found here at hand.

And here we reach the limit of preaching, because I can only point you towards the path which you are to tread. I do not know the specificity of the way you are called to show those around you the life of being at home with God any more than I know the specificity of your failings or your joys. That is yours to discern, but it is imperative that you do, because people's sense of home is precarious. Not just for those forced to flee, but those who see the changes in society around them and feel themselves unanchored and uncertain of what is to come. We know too, I suspect, that the sense of home which depends so much on those who share our life with us, is then lost all the more profoundly with grief. Home, which should be safety and stability, is anything but.

And the Christian answer is not to say that those instabilities are as nothing because our true home is above, but rather that precisely because our true home is in heaven, we experience the instabilities more deeply because they point to the rupture between the world as it is now, and the world which has been redeemed. So with our hearts set on heaven we are called to work tirelessly preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins by pointing people home. We are to share with them in every word and action the transforming love of God, which reaches for them and draws them in a thousand unseen ways, until the day they finally catch a glimpse with the eyes of their heart enlightened.

In Impossible Creatures, the Caspasaran will eventually point Mal to the place where she must offer the sacrifice of her life in love. And so it is with you. Because you are a daily sign of the risen and ascended life of Christ, who makes his home in your heart, and calls you to make his home known even to the ends of the earth. Each one of you a tiny altar, burning brightly, with the immeasurable love and grace that is his. Each one of you possessors of him who is all in all. Each one of you drawn here, to the heart of all things, to hold out your hands and have the entire weight of divine life placed into them, in the fragment of bread and the wine outpoured. Jesus has

been drawn up into heaven so he can be here among you. Jesus has ascended into the heights so that he might draw you home.