

Glebe-St. James United Church

Ascension of Jesus

May 17, 2026

Gathered by God

Preparing Our Hearts for Worship

"Be Thou My Vision"

Welcome

Susan Palmai

My name is Susan Palmai and I am active in the church's outreach ministries.

We're so glad you're here today. Whether you're a first-time guest or a longtime member, whether you are joining us in person or online, we hope you feel at home. This is a place of faith, love, and community. Glebe-St. James is an Affirming Community of Faith in the United Church of Canada. We are committed to creating a safe and inclusive environment where people of all ages, backgrounds, and identities feel loved and supported. Thank you for being here.

This Sunday is Ascension Sunday – the day we remember the ascension of Jesus into heaven. One could say that this is the day that Jesus started working from home!

Announcements

Today following Coffee Time the Women's Intergeneration Group will gather to share a travel experience. They usually finish by 1:30.

The labyrinth will also be open (Fraser Hall) today between 3 and 5 pm.

The Glebe Garage Sale is happening on May 23rd, 8 am – 2 pm. GSJ will have a spot near the Lyon Street doors and the washrooms are available (for a donation) throughout the sale.

Tulipathon happens on May 24th, 2 – 4 pm starting at Commissioners Park (across from Dow's Lake. Rebecca Dalton is happy to answer any of your questions.

GSJ Goes out for dinner returns starting May 30th. David Brown or Margaret Ford are happy to book your reservations or answer questions. Details are in the e-update.

Land Acknowledgement

Marsha Hay Snyder

A month ago, there was an article in the news about a six-month-old Cree girl leading her walking out ceremony on Parliament Hill. The spring ceremony has been held for hundreds of years. It marks the moment when a Cree child takes their first steps outdoors and is introduced to the land. The child is dressed in traditional clothing and carries miniature tools that reflect the relationship they will have with the land in the future. Family members and invited guests also have a role. They are asked to have a positive influence on the child's life. Guests of this Parliament Hill ceremony included the Assembly of First Nations National Chief and Indigenous federal cabinet ministers. The event marked a different approach to relationship building.

We acknowledge that we live and worship on the traditional unceded, unsurrendered land of the Algonquin First Nations and are grateful for the gifts shared with us by Indigenous people and their ancestors.

Candle Lighting We Light This Candle

TLUS 55

**We light this candle for hope.
Await the new life within.
May our hearts now live each day,
so hope can find a way, so hope can find a way.**

Call to Worship

Why are we looking up to heaven?

Christ has come;

Christ has risen;

Christ will come again.

Why are we looking ahead to the future?

The Holy Spirit is among us now.

In our baptism, we have already died and risen with Christ.

Why are we afraid of death and dying?

God's love casts out our fear.

Why are we afraid to follow Jesus?

**In Christ, we have the promise of new life now,
eternal life to come.**

**In Christ, we join our hearts to worship God,
who has prepared for us to enter the reign of God.**

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
as we prepare to worship today,
we ask that you will stretch our imaginations
to sense the majesty and mystery of your ascension.
Help us perceive how Jesus' presence in heaven
can give us confidence in our praying
and hope for the future.
Through Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn Hail the Day that Sees Him Rise

VU 189

- 1 **Hail the day that sees him rise, hallelujah!
taken from our wondering eyes, hallelujah!
Christ, awhile to mortals given, hallelujah!
re-ascends his native heaven. Hallelujah!**

- 2 **There the glorious triumph waits; hallelujah!
lift your heads, eternal gates; hallelujah!
Christ has conquered death and sin; hallelujah!
take the King of Glory in. Hallelujah!**

- 3 **Though returning to his throne, hallelujah!
still he calls the world his own; hallelujah!
him though highest heaven receives, hallelujah!
still he loves the world he leaves. Hallelujah!**

4 **See, he lifts his hands above, hallelujah!
see, he shows the prints of love, hallelujah!
hark, his gracious lips bestow, hallelujah!
blessing on his church below. Hallelujah!**

5 **Still for
us he intercedes, hallelujah!
his prevailing death he pleads, hallelujah!
near himself prepares our place, hallelujah!
first-fruits of our human race. Hallelujah!**

Sign of Peace

Family of faith, God's grace is good news.
God's grace is worth celebrating!
So in the spirit of joy and abundant gratitude,
we are going to celebrate this mercy by
passing the peace with our neighbours.

Friends, the peace of Christ be with you!
And also with you.

Hymn Send Your Peace on Our World

TLUS 135

**Send your peace on your world, God,
you, the creator of peace.
Our hearts fill with peace, God,
You are the source of healing peace.**

**Ya Rab as-salami,
amter a-lay-na aa-sa-lam.
Ya Rab as-salami,
im-la' qu-lu-ba-na as-sa-lam.**

**A-don ha-sha-lom
ham-ter a-ley-nu sha-lom
A-don ha-sha-lom
Ma-le 'et le-bey-nu be-sha-lom**

Listening for Wisdom

Theme Conversation Up, Up, and Away!

Good morning, friends!

Today we're talking about a special day in the church called Ascension Day.

That's the day Jesus went up to be with God.

I need your help to tell the story!

First, can everyone stand up?

Jesus and his friends were together outside.

His friends loved being with him.

Can you give yourself a big hug?

That's how much they loved Jesus.

But then Jesus told them something important.

He said, "God's Holy Spirit will be with you."

Can you put your hand on your heart?

Even when they couldn't see Jesus anymore, they would never be alone.

Then something amazing happened.

Everybody tiptoe very slowly upward.

Jesus went up... and up... and up!

Stretch your arms high to the sky!

His friends looked up.

Can you look way up high?

They kept looking up at the clouds.

Then two messengers said, "Why are you looking up?"

Jesus will always be with you."

So the friends stopped staring at the sky.

Everybody looked around the room.

Because there were important things to do!

There were people to help.

There were friends to love.

There were prayers to pray.

And the friends stayed together while they waited for God's Spirit.

Can everybody sit very quietly for one second? (*pause*)

Good waiting!

Ascension Day reminds us that Jesus is with us everywhere — when we are happy, when we are sad, at church, at home, and wherever we go.

Let us pray:

**Dear God,
thank you for Jesus.
Thank you for loving us all the time.
Help us love others,
help us stay together,
and help us remember
that you are always near.
Amen.**

Hymn Little by Little (*Verses 1 and 5*)

TLUS 134

**Little by little by little.
Little by little by little.
Little by little by little I know,
The tiniest seed will grow.**

**Habits of peace and justice.
Habits of peace and justice,
Habits of peace and justice:
Tools to change our world.**

**Little by little by little.
Little by little by little.**

**Little by little by little I know,
The tiniest seed will grow.**

Prayer for Wisdom

Be with us, Loving God,
As we lean into Scripture,
That we might understand
In a new and fresh way,
Your Word of Life. Amen.

Scripture

Acts 1:6-14

Barbara Coyle

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 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.”

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

This is wisdom from the Acts of the Apostles by Luke.

Gift of Music

"Hallelujah"

arranged by Mervyn Warren, Michael O. Jackson and Mark Kibble
choral arrangement by Teena Chinn

Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah
For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth

The kingdom of this world
Is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ;
And He shall reign for ever and ever
King of Kings
For ever and ever
And Lord of Lords
Hallelujah, hallelujah
And He shall reign for ever and ever
We praise Him!

Reflection Why the Ascension Matters

Rev. Dr. Teresa Burnett-Cole

The ancient world loved stories about heroes ascending into heaven.

The Greeks told stories of mighty figures who, after great deeds, were taken up to dwell among the gods. Heracles was one of the best-known examples. Roman emperors borrowed this imagery too. After death, some Caesars were declared divine and said to have ascended to the heavens. These stories were not just religious imagination; they were political statements. They told people who had power, who deserved honour, and who stood above ordinary humanity.

To ascend meant you had won.

You had escaped weakness, suffering, and mortality. You had become more than human.

So when the early Christians proclaimed that Jesus ascended into heaven, the people around them would immediately have recognized the language.

“Oh,” they might have thought, “another divine hero story.”

But the Ascension of Jesus is profoundly different from the stories surrounding it.

In fact, the differences are so striking that they force us to ask a deeper question: why did Jesus ascend at all? Why was it necessary? Why not simply remain physically present with the disciples forever?

The disciples themselves seem uncertain. In today’s reading they ask, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Even after resurrection, they are still thinking politically. They imagine restoration in terms of national success and visible power. They are waiting for Jesus to finally “take charge.”

But Jesus redirects them away from political triumph. He tells them they will receive the Holy Spirit. They will become witnesses “to the ends of the earth.”

Then, before their eyes, he ascends.

Now if this were a Greek myth, the ascension would be the reward at the end of the story. The hero rises above humanity and leaves ordinary people behind. The ascended figure becomes distant, glorious, untouchable.

But Jesus ascends differently.

First, Jesus does not ascend because he has escaped humanity. He ascends carrying humanity with him.

That matters enormously.

The risen Christ still bears scars. The wounds of crucifixion are not erased. Jesus does not discard his humanity in order to become divine. Instead, Christian faith proclaims something astonishing: in Jesus, humanity itself is welcomed into the life of God.

That was revolutionary in the ancient world.

Most religions of the time imagined a vast distance between gods and humans. The divine was powerful, invulnerable, emotionally detached. Gods conquered; they did not suffer.

But Jesus reveals a completely different kind of glory.

He touches lepers.

He eats with sinners.

He blesses children.

He washes feet.

He forgives enemies.
He dies publicly in humiliation.

And *that* person ascends.

Not a military conqueror.
Not a philosopher king.
Not Caesar enthroned in marble splendour.

A crucified man.

The Ascension declares that self-giving love — not domination — sits at the center of reality.

That is one of Christianity's boldest claims.

The universe is ultimately ruled not by violence or fear, but by mercy.

And perhaps that is why the disciples stand staring upward. Their understanding of power is being turned upside down.

The two messengers finally ask them, "Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?"

It almost sounds like a gentle rebuke.

Don't just stand there looking upward. There is work to do.

Because the Ascension is not about Jesus abandoning the world. It is about changing how Christ is present in the world.

Before the Ascension, Jesus' ministry was limited by geography and time. He could only physically be in one place at once. People had to travel to see him.

After the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christ's presence becomes universal. Christ is no longer confined to Galilee or Jerusalem. The Spirit moves through ordinary people, communities, and acts of love.

The church becomes the body of Christ.

That is why the Ascension matters for us.

Because now the question becomes:

Who will continue Christ's work?

Who will feed the hungry?

Who will welcome the stranger?

Who will comfort the grieving?

Who will challenge injustice?

Who will forgive?

Who will embody hope?

The answer is meant to be: us.

Ascension is not an ending. It is a commissioning.

And notice how the disciples respond. They do not immediately launch a grand campaign. They gather together in prayer. Men and women together. Fearful and hopeful together. Waiting together.

The kingdom of God begins not with spectacle, but with community.

That, too, is very different from the hero stories of the ancient world.

Empires celebrated heroes through conquest and monuments. But the Christian story begins with vulnerable people praying in an upstairs room.

Even today, we are often tempted to measure greatness the way the ancient world did — success, influence, strength, wealth, certainty.

But the Ascension challenges those assumptions.

If Jesus reigns from heaven as the crucified and risen Christ, then compassion is stronger than cruelty. Forgiveness is stronger than vengeance. Love is stronger than fear.

And that changes how we live.

It means no act of mercy is insignificant.
No kindness is wasted.
No suffering is unseen by God.

The Ascension also reminds us not to cling too tightly to the past.

The disciples wanted Jesus to restore the old kingdom they understood. Instead, God was creating something much larger.

Sometimes we also want faith to preserve what is familiar, comfortable, controllable. But the Ascension pushes the church outward — beyond walls, beyond boundaries, beyond fear.

“To the ends of the earth,” Jesus says.

The gospel was never meant to stay still.

And perhaps the most comforting truth of Ascension Day is this: the disciples expected loss, but what they received was presence.

Not the old presence of Jesus standing beside them physically, but the new presence of Christ alive through the Holy Spirit.

Alive in worship.

Alive in compassion.

Alive in courage.

Alive wherever people choose love over hatred and hope over despair.

So Ascension Day is not really about Jesus disappearing into heaven.

It is about Christ filling all things.

And it is about the church discovering that we are called to carry his love into the world. Amen.

Responding in Thanksgiving

Hymn Christ Has No Body Now But Yours

MV 171

Refrain:

**Christ has no body now but yours,
no hands but yours.
Here on this earth, yours is the work,
to serve with the joy of compassion.**

- 1. No hands but yours to heal the wounded world,
no hands but yours to soothe all its suffering,
no touch but yours to bind the broken hope
of the people of God.**
- 2. No eyes but yours to see as Christ would see,
to find the lost, to gaze with compassion;
no eyes but yours to glimpse the holy joy
of the city of God.**
- 3. No feet but yours to journey with the poor,
to walk this world with mercy and justice.
Yours are the steps to build a lasting peace
for the children of God.**
- 4. Through ev'ry gift, give back to those in need;
as Christ has blessed, so now be his blessing,
with ev'ry gift a benediction, be
to the people of God.**

Invitation to Give

To be a community that supports flourishing life for all people, we must create new ways of being together that honour and celebrate the many neuro-diverse gifts that each of us bring. We must create new economies that do not attempt to quantify, judge or label what we bring into the community, but that gives thanks for generous hearts willing to share. The ushers may now come forward to collect tithes and offerings. Thank you

**What can I do? What can I bring?
What can I say? What can I sing?
I'll sing with joy, I'll say a prayer
I'll bring my love. I'll do my share.**

Offering Prayer

Present God, even as Christ ascended, you did not leave us alone. While he was blessing them, you were preparing us to carry the story forward, to be your witnesses, to live in hope and power. In this sacred act of giving, we return a portion of what you have entrusted to us. May these gifts be a blessing to others, as Christ has been to us. Clothe us with courage. Remind us that your Spirit goes with us. And send us, renewed and ready, to be your church in the world. Amen.

**Send your peace on your world, God,
you, the creator of peace.
Our hearts fill with peace, God,
You are the source of healing peace.**

Prayer of Jesus

**Our Mother and 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, the power,
and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

Sent by the Spirit

Hymn Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You

VU 232

- 1 Joyful, joyful we adore you,
God of glory, life and love;
hearts unfold like flowers before you,
opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
drive the gloom of doubt away;
giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day.

- 2 All your works with joy surround you,
earth and heaven reflect your rays,
stars and angels sing around you,
centre of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain,
flowery meadow, flashing sea,
chanting bird and flowing fountain,
sound their praise eternally.

- 3 You are giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blest,
wellspring of the joy of living,
ocean depth of happy rest!
Source of grace and fount of blessing,
let your light upon us shine;
teach us how to love each other,
lift us to the joy divine.

- 4 Mortals join the mighty chorus
which the morning stars began;
God's own love is reigning o'er us,
joining people hand in hand.

**Ever singing, march we onward,
victors in the midst of strife;
joyful music leads us sunward
in the triumph song of life.**

Sending Forth

As people of faith we have gathered for worship.
As people of faith we now return to the world.
Go out to share the story of faith,
the story of life, with the world around you.
We share the faith in word and in deed,
in speech and in action.

As you go out to give a living witness,
as you go out to testify to God's love active in the world,
go knowing that God goes with you,
sharing the laughter and the hope, the fears and the tears.
Go knowing you are never alone, for you go with

God, the Source of Love,
Jesus, the Love incarnate,
And the Holy Spirit, Love's comfort and promise.
And so we sing...

Sung Amen

VU 974

Music to Send Us Forth

"The Strong-Tower Postlude"

End of Worship | Beginning of Service

Welcome to Glebe-St. James United Church.
Thank you for joining with us for our morning worship.
Please join us in Fraser Hall, following the service for a time of fellowship and refreshments.

This week's Music

Today's anthem celebrates Ascension Sunday with a piece from *Handel's Messiah: A Soulful Celebration*, a 1992 gospel album that reinterprets the 1741 oratorio *Messiah* by George Frideric Handel using African-American musical genres.

The prelude and postlude are from the collection "Jazz Inspirations for Organ:"

- "Be Thou My Vision" is by Zsolt Gárdonyi, a Hungarian-German composer, organist and theorist from Würzburg who incorporates jazz elements into his compositions. The tune is from the 1919 Irish hymn tune SLANE.
- "Strong-Tower Postlude" is by Matthias Nagel (b.1958), a German church musician from Dusseldorf who specializes in jazz and pop music for worship. The piece is inspired by the 1529 Martin Luther hymn tune EIN FESTE BURG ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God").

Musical Acknowledgements

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Photo Directories are in

If your photo, included in the directory, was taken by Universal, then we have a complimentary copy of the Photo directory for you. They are available for pick-up today during Coffee Hour.

If you did not have your photo taken by Universal and would like a copy of the directory, then the cost is \$20. Copies are available through the Church office. If you did not have your photo included in the directory but still wish to purchase a copy there are extras available - \$ 20.

Please note that the contact information included in the directories is for personal use only.

Call for Input to Annual Staff Review by May 29, 2026

The Ministry and Personnel Committee (M&P) will be holding annual staff reviews soon. As a regular part of this process, we invite the congregation to share praise or concerns about staff, both ministry and lay personnel, in writing. The substance of the written comments will be discussed with staff during the review meeting. Issues raised will be considered confidentially and acted upon by M&P. Anonymous comments will not be considered.

This year we will conduct reviews for Paul, Kayla and Jennifer in June. Rev Dr Teresa's interview will take place in the Fall, as her last review was done last December.

Please send in your responses regarding individual staff members by Friday May 29, 2026 to the lay support person indicated below, by email or in a sealed envelope marked "Confidential" delivered to the church office:

- Jim Louter (jim.louter@gmail.com) - Kayla Cseh (Children's Church Leader)
- Margo Williams (margoewilliams@yahoo.ca) - Paul Grose (Minister of Music)
- Julia Barry (juliaamy@gmail.com) - Jennifer Reid (Office Administrator)
- Martha Milne (marthacm@rogers.com) - Rev Dr Teresa Burnett-Cole (Coordinating Minister)

We are blessed and thankful for the work of staff in our congregation.

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