

Sermon for Sunday after Ascension + Vicar's Stewardship Challenge
Canon James Shakespeare, 17th May 2026

Acts 1. 6-14, John 17. 1-11

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your people & kindle in us the fire of your love. Amen

Today is a special moment in the Christian year and story of our faith: for it's within that ten-day period between Jesus' ascension into heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Thursday was Ascension Day, and next Sunday we celebrate Pentecost, the Birthday of the Church. And it's a time, traditionally, to take stock and to pray for the renewal of the Church, and the outpouring of God's Spirit afresh on his followers today.

Jesus, resurrected from the dead, after forty days with his disciples, commissions them (sends them) to go out and bear fruit. Picture here a great leader, perhaps Winston Churchill in wartime or Clement Atlee after the war - & I'm not going to become party-political! – encouraging everyone to go out and face the challenges ahead: whether in war or in peace, whether in poverty or in plenty... Well. it was a bit like this when Jesus sent out his disciples at the Ascension, as Matthew's version puts it, and I'll come to the Acts version – our 1st reading – in just a moment (Matthew 28. 16-20):

'Go therefore' Jesus said, 'and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.'

So Jesus sends the disciples out, to get stuck in, to make a difference in the world, and he promises them his Holy Spirit: which will be with them, in his physical absence; enabling them to be faithful, to love and serve, to renew, heal and reconcile all things, through Him; to follow the right path.

So let's move to specific readings appointed for today, this year: Acts 1.6-16 & John 17. 1-11.

Living in the In-Between

Imagine standing on a hill, watching someone you love disappear into the clouds. You've walked with Him, eaten with Him, laughed and wept with Him. You've seen Him die and rise again. And now—He's gone.

That's where the disciples found themselves after the Ascension. They were left staring into the sky, caught between the glory of what had just happened and the uncertainty of what was to come.

We know that feeling, don't we? The "in-between" moments of life—between diagnosis and healing, between job loss and new opportunity, between prayer and answer. The Sunday after Ascension Day is exactly about that space: the waiting, the trusting, the preparing.

1. The Gift of Waiting

In Acts 1, Jesus tells His disciples to *wait* in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. Waiting is not passive—it's active trust.

- **Waiting shapes us:** It teaches patience, deepens faith, and clears space for God's timing.
- **Waiting aligns us:** It draws our hearts into God's purposes rather than rushing ahead with our own plans.

The disciples didn't scatter in despair; they gathered in prayer. They turned their waiting into worship.

2. The Power of Unity

Acts 1:14 says, *"They all joined together constantly in prayer."*

In a world that often pulls us apart—politically, socially, even within the church—this is a radical picture. The disciples were different in personality, background, and temperament, yet they were united in purpose.

Unity doesn't mean uniformity. It means choosing to keep Christ at the centre, even when we disagree. It means praying together, serving together, believing that God will act.

3. The Promise of the Spirit

Sunday after Ascension is a reminder that story isn't over. Jesus' departure was not abandonment—it was preparation. He promised Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Advocate, the One who would empower them to be His witnesses "to the ends of the earth."

We live in that same promise today. The Spirit is not a distant theological idea but a present reality—guiding, convicting, comforting, and empowering us for mission.

So how do we live in this "in-between" time?

- **Pray with expectation** – Not just routine prayers, prayers that believe God will move.
- **Stay together** – Resist isolation; seek fellowship and unity in the body of Christ.
- **Prepare for action** – Waiting is not idleness; it's readiness for when God says, "Go."

+ What about our commitment to the life, work & mission of God – in this parish – through St John's?

& This is where, today, alongside acknowledging all that we do, with such dedication, to 'Seek to be a transforming Christian presence'... welcoming, nurturing, serving & transforming – via our worship, teaching, work with young people, pastoral care, community outreach & reach into local schools & colleges, as well as baptisms, weddings & funerals – I want to say something succinct (today) about **Stewardship**: our challenge, as a Church, entirely self-funded, to best steward our time, talents & money, to further work of Christ in this place.

Vicar's Stewardship Challenge

So what is our challenge, in financial terms? Which is, of course, only one aspect of the big picture – the others being prayer, presence, proclamation & service. +I want to express my gratitude for people's sacrificial generosity, to sustain & develop the life of St John's.

Our INCOME at St John's:

Regular Giving £80k (of which £44k from Parish Giving Scheme)

Other giving £21k

Letting income £36k

TOTAL from these sources £137k

However, **our EXPENSES** significantly exceed this figure:

Parish share £88k

Salaries £20k

Utilities & Insurance £18k

Maintenance £19k

Other Office costs £12k

Mission £6k

TOTAL from these sources £163k...

Meaning an **excess of expenditure over income**, despite our best efforts at keeping costs down, of around £25k per year.

But if regular giving were to increase by 25% we would have another £20k which would almost bridge the gap. +This is our challenge, which I put to you, according to your means, for the year ahead. We therefore need to:-

1. **Increase our personal regular giving** where that is possible.
2. **Remember that our church is self-funding**, and everyone needs to contribute.
3. **Actively support fundraising activities.**
We need a proactive group of people who know the parish and the congregation well to lead on this.
4. **Encourage people to Think long term.**

It's all about awareness – of the scope of what goes on here + our responsibility, individually & collectively, to make a difference.

Please speak to Roger Lilley, our Parish Treasurer; **visit our website**, for further details about out to give, including ***the Parish Giving Scheme***: [St John the Evangelist, Cambridge : Giving](#) or **pick up information** from the back of St John's.

Closing – Eyes on the Promise

The angels told the disciples, *“This same Jesus... will come back in the same way you have seen Him go.”* Our waiting is not endless; our hope is not vague. We live between two certainties: Christ has ascended, and Christ will return.

Until then, we wait—not with empty hands, but with open hearts. We pray, we serve, we witness. We choose LIFE, including how we best steward our time and talents & money (according to our means), for the furtherance of God's Kingdom. We seek to fulfil Christ's commission to go out & bear fruit, to make disciples & to serve his suffering world. And we trust that the same Spirit who came at Pentecost is with us now, empowering us to live as citizens of a Kingdom that is both here and yet to come.

Eternal God, giver of love and power, your Son Jesus Christ has sent us into all the world to preach the gospel of his kingdom: confirm us in this mission and help us to live the good news we proclaim; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **AMEN**