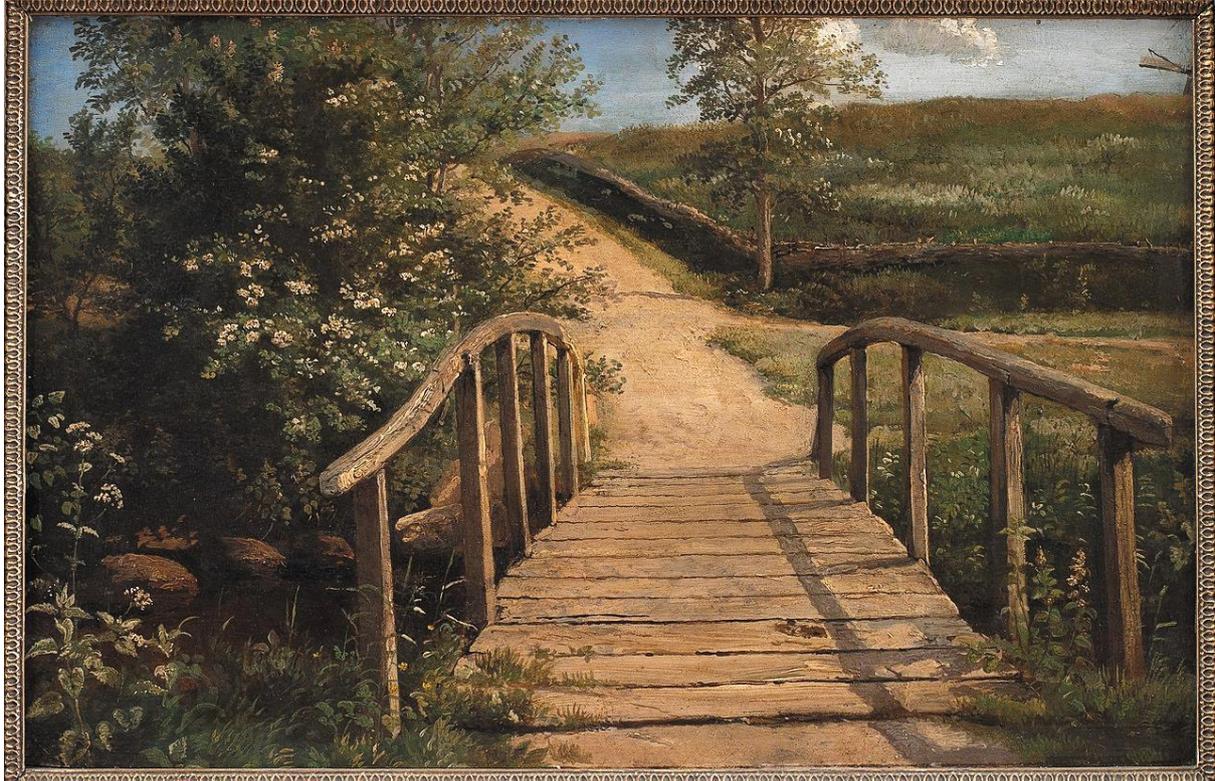


WAITING IN PRAYER

in the season of the Ascension



Dankvart Dreyer, Footbridge over a brook in Assens, Funen, 1842, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, Denmark

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Welcome to Waiting in Prayer

Ascension Day is on 21 May this year. We can read the accounts of the ascension of Jesus in Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:1-14. In both of them the apostles are told to prepare for the gift of the Holy Spirit by spending time together in worship and prayer.

Down through the centuries Ascensontide has become a time of reflection and prayer to prepare for the approaching time of celebration on Pentecost Sunday. Nine days of prayerful waiting for God to arrive.

Over the past four years a global prayer movement called Thy Kingdom Come has grown up. It has reached 172 countries. It invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension to Pentecost. There are three declared aims: to deepen our own relationship with Christ; to pray that others may come to faith in Jesus; and to pray for the empowerment of the Spirit, that we might be effective in our witness.

This year we are offering a pattern of prayer for this season of prayer. We are calling it *Waiting in Prayer* and we hope it will help us all in this time of COVID 19 pandemic.

Over the following nine days, that will take us right up to Pentecost, we will offer a painting which we will reflect upon and to serve as a prayer-prompt. Each day emphasises what is needed when we seek to wait in prayer.

Usually when Christians look at works of art whether they are, historic or modern, famous or little known, they use them to illustrate a given biblical text or preconceived ideas. We are attempting to come from the opposite direction - from art to faith. We are wondering how our faith can be enlightened by what we see in the work of art. Or putting it another way we are trying to let God speak sacramentally through the divine image in all human creativity and not solely through an authorised text or sanctioned tradition. It is faith as seeing before faith as knowing.

We begin with a little-known painting from the Danish 'Golden Age' – a time in history when that nation began to forge a distinctive sense of identity and of place. Dreyer painted for the most part around Funen, his island home, a number of the landscapes share with this work a quite unusual compositional quality. The viewer is standing in the place of the artist, we have stopped (as it were) at a footbridge over a brook, the wooden bridge and the lane beyond are bathed in warm golden sunlight, the stream is cast in shadow.

Dreyer showed great early promise, he rose briefly to prominence, before falling out of favour. By the age of 30 he had abandoned art. His bequest amounts to paintings of, for him, familiar landscapes, which appear enigmatic. Perhaps this reflects his own self-doubt and the prevailing circumstances in his native land ("The country had been at war, and with catastrophic results. The ancient union between Norway and Denmark had been shattered. The economy was in a shambles. The rich grew richer and the poor poorer." Henrik Bramsen's introduction to *Danish Painting: The Golden Age*, National Gallery exhibition catalogue, 1984).

Turn again to the picture. This painting is an invitation – to cross the bridge, and take the path ... that will lead us to the unknown, the as-yet-undiscovered. We, too, offer an invitation: to prayerfully journey through these days from Ascension to Pentecost.

Here is a prayer to accompany this series.

God of all pathways and bridges,
help us to know your presence
as we step into the future;
guide us into a faith
which rests in your grace
and lifts us up
into the refreshing breezes of your Spirit,
with the risen and ascended
Saviour, Jesus the way, the truth and the life.
Amen.

*This prayer novena was conceived and prepared by **Michael Mays** – Methodist Lay-Preacher and **John Rackley** – Associate Minister in the Market Harborough Methodist Circuit.*