

Service of the Word

Easter 7 24 May 2020

Gathering and Greeting

Good Morning, and welcome to our service for the 7th Sunday of Easter, the Sunday after Ascension Day. I said on Thursday that Ascension does not get much focus in the church especially as on this in-between Sunday, between Ascension and Pentecost, the theme more often looks forward to Pentecost, and the coming of the the Holy Spirit rather than back at the impact of Jesus' Ascension. In a relay race this time would be the passing of the baton from one runner to another. Jesus earthly presence is no more so the baton of preaching the gospel and bringing forth the Kingdom of God now passes to the disciples and then through the ages down to us. Today we are going to try to look both ways, if possible, to anticipate the great feast of Pentecost, next Sunday and to join with the disciples in waiting together, constantly in prayer.

We are gathered together as the family of God
to offer praise and thanksgiving
to ask forgiveness of our sins;
to hear and receive God's holy Word
to pray for the needs of the world
and to seek God's grace
that through Jesus Christ our Lord
and in the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to God's service.

Penitence and Forgiveness

Return to the Lord, who will have mercy:
to our God, who will richly pardon. *(Isaiah 55.7)*

A time of silence is kept,

Penitential Psalm

**I confess my iniquity:
and am sorry for my sin.**

In you, O Lord, have I fixed my hope:

You will answer me, O Lord my God.

**O Lord, do not forsake me:
be not far from me, O my God.**

**Make haste to help me:
O Lord of my salvation.** (From *Psalms* 38)

May the Lord forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are
and direct what we shall be,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*SEC Daily Prayer 1988*)

Praise

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Rejoice, then, even in your distress.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

He called us from our darkness into the light of this day.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

Collect of the Day

Let us pray,

Lord God, the King of Glory, hear our prayer;
that as we believe your Son Jesus Christ,
to be exalted with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven;
so also we may know his presence with us now,
and to the end of time;
who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, world without end. Amen

Our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1 is read by Mary

Then they gathered round him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Our second reading is from the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verses 1-11

Jesus said these things. Then, raising his eyes in prayer, he said:

Father, it's time.

Display the bright splendour of your Son

So the Son in turn may show your bright splendour.

You put him in charge of everything human

So he might give real and eternal life to all in his charge.

And this is the real and eternal life:

That they know you,

The one and only true God,

And Jesus Christ, whom you sent.

I glorified you on earth

By completing down to the last detail

What you assigned me to do.

And now, Father, glorify me with your very own splendour,

The very splendour I had in your presence

Before there was a world.

I spelled out your character in detail

To the men and women you gave me.

They were yours in the first place;

Then you gave them to me,
And they have now done what you said.
They know now, beyond the shadow of a doubt,
That everything you gave me is firsthand from you,
For the message you gave me, I gave them;
And they took it, and were convinced
That I came from you.
They believed that you sent me.
I pray for them.
I'm not praying for the God-rejecting world
But for those you gave me,
For they are yours by right.
Everything mine is yours, and yours mine,
And my life is on display in them.
For I'm no longer going to be visible in the world;
They'll continue in the world
While I return to you.
Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life
That you conferred as a gift through me,
So they can be one heart and mind
As we are one heart and mind.
As long as I was with them, I guarded them
In the pursuit of the life you gave through me;
I even posted a night watch.
And not one of them got away,

Reflection

Gyms, nail bars and Disneyland; just three of the things that folk have told me they cannot wait to visit when things get back to normal; to which I add Starbucks and garden centres. Is it odd that faced with weeks of social isolation our minds turn to these simple pleasures as the possibility of easing restrictions begins to happen. Like the disciples in our first reading we are in a limbo time, a time between worlds. For the disciples it was the time between having Jesus physically present with them and the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. For us, here in Scotland at any rate, it is the time between hearing about a Route Map out of lockdown to some of the Phase 1 measures actually becoming a reality. So we dream, we anticipate once again enjoying the things that give meaning and simple pleasure to our lives. For the disciples I guess it was being together, not in fear this time as after the death of Jesus but now in hope and anticipation of what the future would hold.

But even they could realise that this was not looking back to what life was like with Jesus in their lives. This was looking forward to a new way of life, a new normal.

We are in much the same position. We anticipate returning to simple pleasures, to normal and that is OK. It is even helpful if it sustains our hope in the future. But each of us knows in our heart of hearts that we are not going back to the way things were before this pandemic. Our hope too, like the disciples, is in a new normal. We know that some of the simple pleasures we miss just now, like coffee and chat with friends, are within sight. We can maybe see a time when families, at least in this country, can meet up to share their joys and sorrows. But we also recognise that hugs, shared meals and worshipping together in our lovely church are still a long way off on the horizon.

Into this limbo, this in-between time, comes Jesus prayer for his disciples in John's gospel. It is so beautiful, so comforting that I found myself reading and rereading it many times. This prayer speaks to us of being held by God through Jesus in a special way; for we are his disciples just as surely as those gathered in the upper room were Jesus' disciples. This prayer is for us as much as it was for them.

Each of us will take something different from this prayer; something personal that speaks to how we are just now. So read it over slowly for yourself, in your favourite Bible translation, paying attention to which phrase or even single word has meaning for you. For myself I have taken great comfort from one of the last verses;

I guarded them in the pursuit of the life you gave through me;

There is great reassurance in these unsettled and profoundly unsettling times to know that I am guarded, and looked after whatever the future may hold. As we take our first tentative steps on the Route Map later this week carry this prayer with you. The disciples walked about 1 kilometre from the Mount of Olives back to Jerusalem carrying with them Jesus' promise to continue to care for them. Next Sunday we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at the great feast of Pentecost. For myself, my family and friends who share my journey I hope that when Disneyland re-opens there is a Starbucks with a nail bar that we can visit.

Have a good week, if you can and God Bless.

Affirmation of Faith

Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus:*
the divine nature was his from the first:
Yet he did not grasp at equality with God;*
he emptied himself and became like a slave.

**Taking the nature of man
he was revealed in human form;*he humbled himself and became obedient
even to death, death on a cross.
Therefore God has raised him on high,*
and has given him a name above every other name;
So that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,*
in heaven, on earth, and in the depths;
And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord;*to the glory of God the Father. (from *Philippians 2*)**

Intercessions

Conclusion and Blessing

Lord's Prayer

**Our 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,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Responsory

This is the day that the Lord has made; *
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day that the Lord has made; *

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord.

This is the day that the Lord has made.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

This is the day that the Lord has made; *

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Prayer

**Almighty God,
we thank you for the gift of your holy word:
may it be a lantern to our feet,
a light upon our paths,
and a strength to our lives.**

**Take us and use us to love and serve all people
in the power of the Holy Spirit
and in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Common Worship*)**

Blessing

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life, the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and all those for whom we have a care; this day and evermore.
Amen