

Welcome / Announcements / Land Acknowledgement Lilian Sutherland

As followers of Jesus, we are compelled to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. It is our love of God and neighbour that leads us to acknowledge that we gather with gratitude on traditional and unceded Coast Salish Territory of Lkwungen people. We pray that past and present injustices can be reconciled as we commit ourselves again to just and respectful relationships.

Celebrations / Joys and Concerns *God's blessing on you. God's blessing on you.
God's blessing, dear friends. God's blessing on you.*

➤ *Don't be afraid (repeat)*

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 47)

Everyone clap your hands!

Shout to God with joy!

The Lord Most High is King of all the earth.

Everyone stands in awe of God.

God ascends the throne with a joyful cry.

Sing praise to God with joyful voice!

We all belong to God, let everyone rejoice.

➤ *Clap your hands all you nations (verses 1, 3, 5)*

† Gathering Prayer and Words of Hope

Gracious God we rejoice – we give thanks – we lift our hearts to you in prayer.

Because you made the world, and intended it to be a good place – because you called us your children – because you come to us in Christ to bring out the best in each one...

we proclaim that goodness is stronger than evil,
love is stronger than hate,
and truth is stronger than lies.

Because confusion can reign inside us, despite our faith – because anger, tension, bitterness and envy distort our vision – because our minds sometimes worry small things out of all proportion – because we do not always get it right...

we want to believe completely in your way.

Because you have promised to hear us – are able to change us, and are willing to make our hearts your home...

we ask you to confront, control, forgive and encourage us, as you know is best.

We cherish your promise of forgiveness, O God. Change our lives until we illustrate the grace you freely offer. We pray in Jesus' name. **Amen**

As Jesus instructed his followers, the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name. Friends, your sins are forgiven – be at peace.

➤ *Jesus shall reign where'er the sun*

275

† Prayer for Understanding **Dennis Sutherland**

Living God, long ago, faithful women proclaimed the good news of Jesus' resurrection, and the world was changed forever. Teach us to keep faith with them – that our witness may be as bold – our love as deep – our faith as true. Teach us to keep faith as we hear and respond to your Holy Word. Amen

Scripture

Acts 1:1-11 [NT 118]

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. *"This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

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."*

Ephesians 1:15-23 [NT 192]

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Luke 24:44-53 [NT 91]

Then he said to them, *"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."*

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, *"Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so, stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

This cartoon image appeals to my sometimes-irreverent sense of humour. I think it may have been one of a boxed set of greeting cards I got but no one sends cards to celebrate Ascension Day so maybe I found it somewhere else. It seems to me a missed market – think of the sales opportunity for balloons or the marketing prospect for climbing gear and parasailing... Silly perhaps but when I think of the image in our texts today of Jesus ascending in a cloud, I can picture early episodes of Star Trek and the clichéd command to “beam me up Scotty”. It is easy also to recall the closing scene of Mary Poppins as she prepares to leave her charges, Jane and Michael Banks, having brought healing joy into their dysfunctional family. They prepare to “go fly a kite” and Mary rises into the air as the wind buoys up her immense black umbrella. On the ground, the chimney sweep – angel – Bert, watches her sail up and away.



The gospel of Luke ends with much the same scene – maybe that’s where the writers of Mary Poppins got the idea! Jesus died on the cross and was buried in a tomb. When the women went to prepare the body, the tomb was empty. The disciples were in turmoil about the resurrection. On the same day two disciples headed for Emmaus. They encountered the risen Jesus on the road – at first, they did not recognize him; but when they did, they returned immediately to Jerusalem to tell the others. While they were talking about it, Jesus appeared among the gathered group. He talked with them – showed them his hands and feet and ate fish with them. He opened their minds to the teaching of scripture, called them to be witnesses – proclaimers – told them to stay in Jerusalem to await the Holy Spirit, blessed them and then is carried up to heaven.

It is all very Disney – quite magical. Did it really happen? I don’t know – seems “sketchy” as the kids say. In fact, the person said to have written this gospel account – Luke – tells about the event somewhat differently in his sequel work: the Book of Acts.

Luke begins his second volume with a salutation to an apparent benefactor, Theophilus. He reminds this unknown person – one who loves God – that his first book was about everything Jesus began to do and teach up to the day he was lifted up. He goes on to tell about the fact that after his suffering, death and resurrection Jesus spent forty days with the disciples talking about the kingdom of God. Forty days – not just one as in the gospel account. Is Luke making this up? Is he exaggerating in this telling of the story or was he lying in his first book? Which version is true?

That can be where we get stuck – thinking that truth and facts are just the same thing – thinking that only that which is historically and scientifically provable is true. What a pale and poverty-stricken view of “truth” this is!

Is Hamlet true? If the great and enigmatic play speaks to our personal indecisiveness, – our loud claims to act coupled with an inability to act at all – then Hamlet is surely true. Yet, we need not go to Castle Elsinore to prove this truth; we need only gaze honestly into our own heart and life. When we read Luke’s writing – in the Gospel and in Acts – we need to keep a generous definition of truth in mind.

Luke focuses on this *lifting up* as the hinge that holds his two books together even if some of the details contradict. It is an image he employed following the Transfiguration – an image of exodus from earth – that mirrors Elijah’s mysterious ascension in a fiery chariot. Luke connects the events of Jesus’ ascent to God with a similar experience in the Hebrew Bible and joins Jesus with the quintessential prophet of justice, Elijah. By so doing, Luke in his unique literary way uses the ascension theme as a way of proclaiming the true identity of Jesus – recalling his many roots in the sacred past of Israel’s story.

The point of the story is not in the question of whether these events really happened. Luke is writing an “orderly account” as a person of faith who sees what Jesus has done as the fulfillment of ancient claims. Just as Elijah was *lifted up* to God, so Jesus was *lifted up* to God. This is not history – not science. There is no recording of the event – no film at eleven – no *YouTube* link to check on. Luke is preaching, not reporting – he is sermonizing, not summarizing. His truth is not rooted in when or where, but in what it means and why it is important. There is more theological poetry in Luke than historical claim.

We need to let go of that kind of burden of proof – accept the creativity of Luke to generate an image that captivates and think about how the Ascension can speak loudly to our own struggle for a rich faith.

Luke very cleverly and with a wonderful verbal economy transitions his story from Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and promises to his followers to his new story of Jesus’ gift of the Spirit that will enable the apostles to do what he has done, namely, speak of the Good News of God and form Christian communities. His intent is not so much to convey facts but to draw us into transformation and empowerment for ministry.

Just like Bert in *Mary Poppins* the disciples in Luke’s story stand and watch the one who has brought healing joy and the promise of new life sailing up and away. After hearing the Risen Jesus demand that they stay in Jerusalem in order to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, the followers stand transfixed while their master rises into the sky,

transported by a cloud. Even after he has disappeared, it seems they remain staring into space until their reverie is broken by the appearance of two men in white robes.

Just as in the gospel, where two men attempt to explain to the women who are looking for Jesus' dead body that they are looking in the wrong place – since living beings are not to be found in graveyards – so now two men tell the stiff-necked disciples that their eyes are not looking in the right place. *“Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?”*

The thing is that they didn't know where to look. If they aren't supposed to stand and look toward heaven, where should they look? What should they do?

What should we do and where should we be looking in this in-between time in which we live – this time between Jesus being *lifted up* and his promised return to bring all things into divine harmony? When Jesus takes his leave from center stage, how are we supposed to continue faithfully on the journey and in the story as it unfolds?

Where should we look? Not to a calculated future or to an idealized past – perhaps we can ignore the angels in white and keep looking at the sky – to heavenly things. “Turn your eyes upon Jesus” – WWJD – and all that.

The thing is that when Jesus departs to heaven, he is not in some remote other place but constantly drawing near to us. This ascension story is not telling us how Jesus came to be so absent from us, but how he came to be everywhere present and everywhere approaching instead of confined to one particular location at a time. The heaven that Jesus has entered is not far off beyond the remotest galaxy. Heaven is God's love and life breaking into our present reality and Jesus is in the midst of that, constantly drawing near, constantly reaching out to us. If we want to keep our eyes on Jesus, we need to be looking for him in the people and events all around us, not in some heaven beyond the sky.

William Willimon, teacher and theologian, tells of being caught in a massive traffic jam caused by cars bumping into each other while the drivers tried to watch a man climb the outside wall of the Sears Tower in Chicago. Their eyes were on the sky and not the road and so everything came to a halt. He commented that we might be like these drivers: in trying with all our might to keep our eyes on Jesus we can fail to notice those in the world around us, and people may get hurt.

We can't simply look to ourselves either because Jesus tells the disciples to wait for the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. What should we do – everything – nothing? Where can we look?

Rather than gaze into the sky, waiting for magic, we can look to the law, the prophets, and the apostles. In these messages, we might hear and understand the strange new

ways of Jesus Christ who forgives his enemies rather than restoring a triumphant kingdom to crush them. Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures – our minds can open too.

We are also encouraged to look for the signs of God's love and life breaking forth in the most unlikely places all around us – to celebrate them and nourish them and bear witness to them.

We are to look to the work of the present and the future – not to a frantic activism that seeks to do it all in our own power, but to a prayerful discernment that asks what new thing God is doing and seek to humbly cooperate with it – to bear witness to it. Not only to stand looking but to proclaim what we have seen and know to be true and then to follow Jesus into action. **Amen**

 **Fill all my life, O Lord my God** (tune: Crimond #11) **653**

† Offering Invitation

Though the Easter season draws to a close today, we continue to enjoy the blessings God pours out for us in Christ and in creation. Let us give thanks to God for these blessings as we present our offering in Jesus' holy name.

➤ **Praise God from whom all blessings flow** **306**

† Offering Prayer

Eternal God, we praise you that Christ has ascended to rule in love at your right hand, while the Holy Spirit continues the work of salvation throughout your creation. We offer our gifts and our lives in gratitude for that work and dedicate them to your purposes in the name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen

An Affirmation of Faith: *The Apostles Creed* responsive
Do you believe in God the Father?

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

Gathering at the Lord's Table

The celebration of communion is always a festival of friends – where we gather around the table with all our hopes and dreams, longing for a glimpse of the holy.

It is here where bread is broken, and the cup is shared that we can be most truly ourselves – seeing ourselves and others as children of the living God.

Here, that which is earthly becomes divine and that which is human becomes more than has ever been dreamed.

Come to the table – you are all welcome. Christ invites us to meet him here.

 ***Here is bread: here is wine***

546

God be with you.

And also, with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is good to give God thanks and praise...

It is truly right and our greatest joy to give you thanks and praise, Holy One, Creator of heaven and earth. From the days when you called Moses and Miriam to lead your people, your love has brought freedom in the face of oppression, and guidance through the wilderness of trials and temptations. When your people turned from your ways, you called us back to you through your prophets. In Christ Jesus, you came to live among us, to show us how to follow your truth and find our joy complete in you. Therefore, we join our voices with angels and archangels – with your prophets, apostles, saints and servants in every time and place, singing...

O holy, holy, holy God, O God of time and space. All earth and sea and sky above bear witness to your grace. Hosanna in the highest heav'n, creation sings your praise. And blessed is the one who comes and bears your name always!

God of majesty and mercy blessed is your Son, Jesus Christ, sent to be our Saviour. He delivers us from sin and death – bringing abundant life through his courage and compassion. By raising him to new life, you promise us life everlasting. Ascended to your right hand, he shares his mercy throughout your whole creation.

On the night of his arrest Jesus sat down to eat with friends. During the meal, he took the bread, said a prayer, broke it and shared it with everyone at the table, saying: *"This is my body which is for you. Do this to remember me."*

At the end of the meal, he took the cup and raised it, saying: *"This is God's new covenant, made possible because of my death. Drink this all of you, to remember me."*

We ponder, O God, the mystery of his promise that in this meal we are joined to him and to one another as a holy people. Remembering your mighty and merciful acts, celebrate with great joy the resurrection of Jesus, his presence with us in this feast, and his promise of a new creation as we affirm the mystery of faith:

Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again! Sing Christ has died and Christ is risen, Christ will come again!

God of grace and power, you invite us to share in mysteries that are beyond our understanding ...in simple trust we seek the transforming power of your Spirit us and upon this bread and wine. By the miracle of your grace may they be for us your body – vibrant with your life, renewing and making us whole. And as the bread and wine which we now eat and drink are changed into us, may we be changed again into you – bone of your bone – flesh of your flesh, ...loving and caring in the world.

In Christ, with Christ, through Christ – by the power of the Holy Spirit – all glory is yours, now and forever and so we sing...

Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen! Amen, amen, O Holy One! Hosanna and amen!

Sharing Bread and Cup *Please come forward to receive Holy Communion – everyone is welcome at this table.
If you are unable to come to the front, please signal an elder who will come and serve you.
We use gluten and dairy-free bread. You may choose either juice or wine.*

The one who was buried but rose from the dead is now present for us in this bread

The one whose wounded hands were offered to the unbelieving now reaches out in this cup.

The bread of life – the cup of grace – we remember and share with thanksgiving these gifts in which God comes to us so that we may come to God.

† Prayer after Communion

Gracious God, we praise, worship and adore you for the food received at your table. We go from here, strengthened, refreshed, and empowered by your Spirit to be true and joyful witnesses of Jesus Christ in a broken world.

Lord of abundant life, friend of sinners – living word that wakes the dead – we come, praying for ourselves and for others. Living God, renewer of all creation – whose Spirit gives life to everything that breathes and grows – we pray for this earth and for all with whom we share it.

We pray for all who are deprived of simple necessities – for all whose bodies are broken and wasted through lack of food and medicine – for all whose minds are stunted through lack of education – and all who suffer and die at the hands of others or through the careless use of the earth's resources.

We pray for home and family life – for the wider communities of which we are a part. We pray for all who struggle with difficult relationships and remember all who care for loved ones in illness or in pain. We pray also for all who know the valley of tears and bereavement.

We pray for the church – congregations and communities in this and other lands – may people of faith give gracious witness to Christ – ever open to the transforming power of the Spirit – living the way of God's commands on earth and sharing in the worship and joy of heaven. Give peace in our hearts and in our homes – in our nation and in our world. Hear these prayers, O God, and all the unspoken cries of our hearts as we sing together in prayer as Jesus taught...

➤ ***Our Father in heaven*** (*The Lord's Prayer – no repeats*) **469**

➤ ***There's a spirit in the air*** **764**

Blessing

Let us go now to be alert and alive for the sake of our God. Receive the Word of hope – speak the Word of truth. May God's spirit be in each one of us as we share the good news. The grace of the risen Lord, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ ***Go now in peace*** **622**