

Worship at home May 16, 2021

Ascension Sunday



God calls us to worship: Psalm 47

Hymn: #267 “Rejoice, the Lord is King”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipRM9AelP6w> (Rejoice the Lord Is King, Emu Music, Charles Wesley, arrangement © 2019 Philip Percival & Alanna Glover, CCLI Song No: 7125867)

We bring our praise and confessions:

Holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
You chose to become one of us in Jesus Christ,
sharing our joy and sorrow,
manifesting your greatness in the child of the manger,
revealing your Lordship in the master washing his disciples' feet,
showing forth your glory in the shame of the cross.
And so, we praise you for your love
which is great enough to embrace the universe,
yet close enough to enter our hearts.

On this day as we celebrate your rightful ascension to the throne of heaven and earth,
grant that we may also in heart and mind there ascend
and dwell continually with you,
beyond the pull of every power and authority that seeks to undermine your kingdom.

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rembrandt_The_Ascension_1636_Oil_on_canvas_Alte_Pinakothek_Munich_Germany.jpg

God of mercy:

you have called us to be thankful for your good gifts to us,
but too often we have taken them for granted as if we deserved them.

You have called us to be hopeful through the gospel of Jesus Christ,
but too often despair has come upon us,
and the cares of the world have weighed us down.

You have called us to be joyful in the wonder of your presence among us,
but too often we become mired in the mundane
and lose the gift of reverence.

By your saving power, O God,
enable us to celebrate your love for us
with joy and thanksgiving.

God assures us of his forgiveness:

He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.²

**In response to the gospel,
we confess our faith and offer our lives and resources:**

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

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.

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

*If you are a member or adherent of either of the Moore Presbyterian congregations,
please remember to submit your offering to the appropriate treasurer. For contact
information, speak with Rev. Ian.*

² Colossians 1:13, 14.

God speaks to us through his Word:

READ LUKE 24:44-53

READ EPHESIANS 1:15-23

The Ascension of Jesus of Nazareth

1. Thursday, May 13th was the fortieth day since Easter Sunday.

The testimony of scripture preserves the tradition that after Jesus was resurrected from the dead, he was with his disciples 40 days. This was no ghostly haunting. He walked, talked, ate, and drank with them. A physical, resurrected, bodily man.

After 40 days, Jesus left.

We call that event the Ascension of Jesus.

Today, is Ascension Sunday.

Luke wrote that, “While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.” In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke added some more detail: “When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”³

A quick Google image search of “Jesus’ Ascension” yields numerous imaginative depictions of Jesus rising into the sky on a cloud. Sort of a vertical take-off kind of thing. This is one example of such a depiction by Rembrandt:



A great deal of damage has been done to the church’s collective theology by trying to depict in visual media what happened on that Day of his Ascension. Such paintings

³ Acts 1:9.

⁴ See note #1

and images reinforce the mistaken idea that heaven is some realm above the sky. It is not. Heaven is the realm of God's existence. It is God's control room. God's throne room. It is not a place above the sky where we go when we die. It is that place from which God's creative grace and love pours out into our context. And that place from which Jesus will return when the dead are resurrected and there is no longer any distinction between God's realm and humanity's.

The mechanics of his departure are best left in the realm of poetry and imagination.

What is important to keep in mind is that Jesus is not here. And yet, his influence is nonetheless powerful.

A more helpful way to think of Jesus' departure and present absence is not directional but influential.

A kingdom might encompass a vast territory. The king is not physically in each house and each village within the bounds of his kingdom. Nevertheless, his influence is felt throughout his domain. Every citizen knows his authority, his protection, and his strength. Periodically, a king will tour his kingdom, establish relations with the citizens, perhaps clarify some of the laws and policies. Perhaps lead some battles. And then he returns to his throne room from where he continues to make decisions and take actions to better the lives of his citizens.

This is what we see in Jesus' life and ministry.

Having visited his citizens, clarified his laws and policies, gone to war against our enemies: Sin, Death, and the Devil, on our behalf – and defeating them! Jesus has returned to the throne room of heaven and earth. He has left us his decrees in the Scriptures and the Spirit, and he continues to advocate on our behalf and make intercessions for us in the heavenly throne room. Yet he is not physically visible to us.

His ascension is not directional (unless, perhaps in the metaphor of ascending the steps of the throne.) It is an ascension of status.

The One of whom it was said brought near the kingdom of God by his birth and baptism, has, in his ascension taken his rightful seat on the throne.

2. We are often so burdened by the cares of the day and mired in the mundane, that the doors of our minds and the eyes of our hearts are closed to the full implications of this reality. We fail to recognize the immensity of the life our King invites us into. We fail to recognize the full implications of the forgiveness of sin by the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

For this reason, Paul earnestly prayed:

*...that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe.*⁵

3. In his letter to the Colossian Christians, Paul wrote that by God's grace we are "rescued from the power of darkness and *transferred* into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin."⁶

The truth of the gospel is that, if you accept God's grace in faith evidenced by repentance, you are a citizen of this kingdom

And so, share the hope, the inheritance, and the power of this life that transcends the forces of this age in Jesus' name.

⁵ Ephesians 1:18-19

⁶ Colossians 1:13-14

4. In truth, the church exists to testify to this reality. To testify to Christ's ascension and all that follows from that. The church is the "fullness of the one who fills all in all!" or, in the rendering of *The Message*:

The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.⁷

Our job is to make known that regardless of anxiety over job security; regardless of international ecological-political-economical debates; regardless of war, lockdown, personal strife; regardless of boredom and loneliness,

The king who forgives sin,
 who redeems his people,
 who intercedes on our behalf,
 who makes all things new,
is on the throne.

We may not see him except by the eyes of faith, yet his gracious influence is nonetheless palpable.

To make this known, we must know it ourselves.

The testimony of the church begins in the privacy of our minds and hearts. To quote a hymn we've used multiple times over the past pandemic months:

May the peace of God my Sovereign
 rule my life in everything;
that I may be calm to comfort,
 sick and sorrowing.

Our outward actions bear witness to the sovereignty of Christ in the degree that our inner processes are ruled by his sovereignty.

To that end, I want to suggest an exercise for this week: TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN YOUR PRAYERS. When you pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in

⁷ Ephesians 1:22-23

heaven,” consider how that conversation you’re having or that interaction you’re having – whether it be with another person or your own thoughts and emotions – how might it transpire if you were transferred into the kingdom of God. If sin had been forgiven. If Christ had been resurrected. If we were equipped with his decrees and Spirit. If Jesus continues to intercede on our behalf. If God’s great work of redemption had begun. How would that interaction transpire?

Because, the truth is: all of that has taken place. Jesus sits at God’s right hand in the heavenly places. There he prays for us. There his influence transcends all forces of this age. As your minds and the eyes of your hearts open to this gospel,

You might find that some things become less important.

You might find that some things become more important.

In all our interactions, let us bear witness to the truth that:

The triune God is king over the nations,
God sits on his holy throne.
So, clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.⁸
And, crown him with many crowns!

Hymn: #274 “Crown him with many crowns”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXfxv9f-oDU>
(New Scottish Hymns Band - <https://newscottishhymns.com/>)

⁸ Psalm 47

We respond with faith and service:

O God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all life,
You have begun the work of creating a new world,
a world where justice is known,
where freedom and healing are available to all people.
We pray for the places in the world that are caught up in violence,
where people are held captive or struggle under oppressive powers,
and where sickness prevails, and medical resources are scarce.
(Silence for a count of ten)

Grant those affected courage and perseverance through your Spirit.
May people everywhere find the fullness of life you intend for us all.

You have begun the work of creating a new community,
a community where love is shared, and all find a sense of belonging.
We pray for groups who are made to feel like they don't belong,
for families that caught up in tension or strife,
and for those who feel isolated or desperate because no one seems to care.
(Silence for a count of ten)

Grant them all courage and comfort through your Spirit.
May people everywhere find the fullness of life you intend for us all.

You have begun the work of making a new creation,
a creation where all that has been broken is being restored,
where all that has been distorted is made right,
and what has been polluted or damaged is renewed.
We pray for the earth, the places where its natural balances are threatened
and species put at risk by human exploitation.
(Silence for a count of ten)

Send your healing Spirit to renew the earth and make us wiser stewards.
May creatures everywhere know the fullness of life you intend for us all.

As you work towards making all things new,
we pray for renewal in our churches and ministries,
for leaders tired out by the responsibilities of coping with pandemic demands,
and for church members who have drift away in the months of distancing.
(Silence for a count of ten)

Send your energizing Spirit to gather the church in ways both familiar and new.
May your servants in every church know the fullness of life you intend for us all
and be empowered to bear witness to Jesus in refreshing ways.
For together we offer the prayer he taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: #765 “We’ve a story to tell to the nations”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UbPHxRKNMP8> (no lyrics)

God sends us with His blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you,
the Lord be kind and gracious to you,
the Lord look upon you with favour,
and grant you peace. Amen.