

Worship at Home
May 22, 2022
6th Sunday of Easter
Ascension Sunday/ Healing and Reconciliation Sunday



“The ascension of the King”

God calls us to worship:

(Congregational response in bold type)

The Lord is risen!

He is risen indeed!

Psalm 47

Hymn: #265 “Hail the day that sees Christ rise”

We offer our prayers:

Prayer of Praise and Supplication:

God of glory and majesty,
mystery and mercy;

in Christ Jesus

you came to live among us, sharing in our joys and sorrows.

After he suffered and died for our sake,

you raised him and took him up in glory so that he might fulfill all things.

As our ascended Lord,

he gives hope to your people in all places,
in every generation and every situation.

So, we claim that hope this day,

for ourselves and for the world you love,

offering you our praise and worship in the name of Jesus Christ,

who now lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of Confession (Unison):

**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 offers the assurance of grace:

We offer our lives and resources:

Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar (Knox)

God speaks to us:

Readings: Mark 16:19-20
Luke 24:44-53
Acts 1:1-11

The ascension of the King

1. This coming Thursday, May 26th will be 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.

It is what we profess in the Apostles' Creed:

*He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

Both Mark and Luke tried to capture the moment of Jesus' ascension. Mark wrote that, "the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was *taken up into heaven* and sat down at the right hand of God."¹ Luke wrote that, "While he was blessing them, he *withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.*" Then added some more detail in the Acts of the Apostles: "When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, *and a cloud* took him out of their sight."²

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. Which is probably the natural image our imaginations conjure when we read of the Lord's departure!

However, a great deal of damage has been done to the church's collective theology by trying to depict in visual media what happened on the day of Christ's ascension. Such paintings 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 the inner chamber of the celestial temple of which the Jerusalem temple was a model. It is God's throne room.

¹ Mark 16:19

² Acts 1:9.

When we imagine Jesus' ascension, it's helpful to imagine the plot in the story of a king.

The king's base of operations is his throne within his castle or Great Hall. There he hears from his advisors and opponents. There he makes his decisions and pronounces his judgements. Periodically, a king will leave his throne, tour his kingdom, establish relations with the citizens, clarify some of the laws and policies, address concerns and grievances, maybe even lead some battles. And then he returns to his throne room from where he continues to make decisions and pronounce judgements to secure the health of his kingdom.

This is what we see in life of Jesus.

Having left his throne room (heaven) in the Incarnation, which we celebrate at Christmas, the King visited his citizens, clarified his laws and policies, showed us what matters to Him. Then, by the cross he went to war against our enemies: Sin, Death, and the Devil, on our behalf. Having defeated the Enemy in his Resurrection (which we celebrate on Easter Sunday, and indeed on every Sunday), Jesus has returned to the throne room.

His ascension is not a vertical take-off into the sky; rather, it is an ascension of status. The imagery of Jesus being "taken up into heaven" is best interpreted as a king who has returned from a tour of his kingdom and ascends the steps of his throne.

The presence of the cloud indicates the divine glory that accompanied this event.

What is important is that Jesus is not here. And yet, although he is physically absent, his influence is nonetheless powerful.

2. Today is also specially designated in the Presbyterian Church in Canada as "Healing and Reconciliation Sunday." A day to draw attention to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

To that end, the PCC has circulated a summary document of these calls to action and justice with explanations and prayers. If you're interested, there's a link to the document on today's "Sermon" page on our congregational website.

The first five Calls to Action "deal with protecting and prioritizing the needs and well-being of Indigenous children."³

Call to Action #3 is for all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principle. Jordan's Principle is named after Jordan River Anderson who

*was from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba. He was born with complex medical needs and spent more than two years unnecessarily in hospital while provincial and federal governments argued over which jurisdiction was responsible for covering Jordan's health-care cost. Jordan died when he was five years old.*⁴

Call to Action #48 calls

*upon faith groups to formally adopt and comply with the principles, norms, and standards of the United Nations declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.*⁵

Among others, a goal of this call to action is to eliminate anti-Indigenous racism that manifests in discrimination and violence, and unequal access to healthcare, water, housing, and freedom to practice their faith.

Call to Justice 15.2 is a call to all Canadians to

*Decolonize by learning the true history of Canada and Indigenous history in your local area. ...*⁶

It's a call to recognize and denounce the worldview that devalues Indigenous people and culture, treating them "less than" non-Indigenous people. It's a call to recognize, understand, and work to dismantle the systemic racism that persists to this day.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Quoted from Healing and Reconciliation Prayer Resource available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/2022/05/16/hr-sunday-2022/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

How we understand the unique sovereignty of Christ, and how we relate to Him as King, will affect how we relate to other people, cultures, and belief systems.

In 1994 the Presbyterian Church in Canada made a formal confession to the Indigenous communities of Canada for our role in the residential schools and the colonial mindset that wove concepts of the Kingdom of God and the sovereignty of Christ together with the social, political, and economic values of empire-building. This combination resulted in a worldview that essentially saw anyone who didn't look, farm, and worship like those of the empire as less-than-human. This actually has a name: the Doctrine of Discovery which allowed Europeans to say that we "discovered" North America – as if there were no humans living here before us! A doctrine which the PCC now strongly repudiates. One of the results of all this is that the Presbyterian Church in Canada was complicit in attempts to make Indigenous people like European Christian settlers.

In that confession, there's a line which I think is very helpful in trying to navigate the tension between proclaiming the unique sovereignty of Christ – together with the unique faith that inspires, obedience to His law, and standing in His judgement – versus pushing a Christian colonialism that seeks to change everyone to "be like us." The line is this:

*We confess that the Presbyterian Church in Canada presumed to know better than Aboriginal peoples what was needed for life. ... In our cultural arrogance we have been blind to the ways in which our own understanding of the Gospel has been culturally conditioned, and because of our insensitivity to Aboriginal cultures, **we have demanded more of the Aboriginal people than the gospel requires, and have thus misrepresented Jesus Christ....**⁷*

That, I think, highlights the fine line between proclaiming the sovereignty of Christ and the presence of the Kingdom of God, and a colonial system intertwined with Christianity which seeks to make everyone "like us."

⁷ The Confession of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1994. Note: in the 1994 confession, the term "Aboriginal" is used. "Indigenous people" would be a better term.

The Good News of the Kingdom of God and the kingship of Christ requires does not require people to lose their dignity. It does not require people to lose their language – in fact, one of the miracles of Pentecost is that all the people heard the apostles proclaim the kingship of Christ *in their own language!* The Good News of the ascension of Jesus to the throne of heaven and earth does not require people to necessarily change their style of dress or cut their hair a certain way. It does not require children to languish in hospitals while governments argue over who gets to pay the bill.

3. The ascended King empowered the church with the Holy Spirit to make known the reality of His government by proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sin, by proclaiming the good news that God is real and Christ is King; by healing the sick, casting out demons; by being the body of Christ – his hands, feet, eyes, heart, and voice in our present reality.

During his tour of his earthly kingdom, as he clarified the laws and policies, he has shown that He cares for the healing and well-being of all people, especially the most vulnerable.

4. We make known the reality that Christ is on the throne when, in his name, we protect and prioritize the needs of children, when we accept that He sets the standard for who is worthy of respect, health, security, and dignity. And He created the human race in its entirety, called it all good, and gave his life for its salvation.

Throughout the Easter season we've been studying the appearances of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples during the 40 days prior to his ascension. In all the appearances he commissioned them to go out in the power of the Holy Spirit and evangelize. To tell the world about him. To call people to repentance and baptism. To invite others to join us and him around the fire.

Church history sadly reveals that we have often misrepresented Jesus in our missionary endeavours.

That doesn't change the good news truth that the Lord, the Most High, is awesome; a great king over all the earth. It does, however, call us with great humility to look to the King for direction and power in mission, and not to our own self-interests.

The testimony of the church begins in the privacy of our own hearts and minds.

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

When you pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” consider how that interaction you’re having – whether it be with your own thoughts and emotions, or with another person, or navigating cultural and racial tensions – might transpire if you believed that Jesus really is King, that He sets the standard for right relationships, and that He will come again to bring heaven to earth once and for all. Amen.

Hymn: #266 “King of Kings”

We respond in prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

Lord, our God,
The earth and all its peoples belong to you.
As we come before you in prayer,
we are painfully aware that the earth itself is at risk,
from the ways your people live on it,
and the conflicts we provoke among each other.
We seek your healing and hope this day,
for the earth and all its creatures,
and for your people of every nation.

God of healing and hope,
we pray for peace with justice to emerge in war torn lands,
and in every place of conflict where power struggles put innocents at risk.
We name before you the people and places on our hearts today:

*Hold a time of silence for 20 seconds, inviting people to speak out their
concerns,
or naming situations in current news.*

Send your Spirit of wisdom and compassion
to break open the hearts of leaders to work with each other
to protect the innocent and restore order for the wellbeing of all.
May your ways of truth and justice prevail
In every heart and in every land.
God of mercy,
Hear our cry.

God of healing and hope,
We pray for Presbyterian World Service and Development and its partners,
and all groups offering aid and renewal in places
where disaster and conflict have left people at risk.
Support those who have lost homes, families and livelihoods
to find courage to go on
and open hearts of those in safety to share with those in need.
God of mercy,
Hear our cry.

God of healing and hope,
we know that this land we call home faces conflict and pain,
and that communities are divided by deep disagreements.
We pray for healing and understanding to deepen
between Indigenous people and those who settled this land
with no thought for those who already called it home.
Protect those who face racist attitudes and actions in daily life,

and restore dignity and hope to those who have suffered injustice
in a system that benefitted others.

Open our eyes to the creativity and courage in communities
that feel unfamiliar to us,

and open our hearts to build new relationships with each other
so we grow closer as neighbours and friends.

God of mercy,

Hear our cry.

God of healing and hope,

We pray for the renewal of your creation

and for the protection of species at risk.

By your Spirit, teach us to change our ways when they are harmful to the earth,
and inspire our ingenuity to find solutions to problems that seem so vast.

God of mercy,

Hear our cry.

God of healing and hope,

We pray for those who know sickness or pain,

for all who live in grief, loneliness or anxiety,

and all who find these uncertain times overwhelming in any way.

In silence, we remember before you those for whom we have special concern this
day:

Keep silence for 20 seconds.

By your Spirit, surround each one with strength and love,

and equip us to offer support for those whose lives are woven into ours.

God of mercy,

Hear our cry.

God of healing and hope,

Jesus walks with us day by day to see us through every challenge,

and so we claim the healing and hope he offers in the words he taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with God's blessing:

Hymn: #275 "Jesus shall reign where're the sun"

Blessing: