



Order of service

Date: Sunday May 24th, 2020

Easter 7A

We acknowledge that we are worshipping on the traditional lands of the Boon Wurrung people, of the Kulin nation, and pay our respects to elders past and present.

DON'T FORGET YOU CAN LOG INTO THE CHURCH WEBSITE AND SEE MUCH OF THIS BY VIDEO ON THE FRONT PAGE!!!!

INTROIT – Christ be our light (vss. 2,5)

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Refrain:

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

5. Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Refrain:

*Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Here we gather, each from our individual lives.
We carry into this place the joys and the worries of our week,
the weight of our personal experience,

the anxieties of all that the future may hold.

**All: Here we gather,
in prayer and preparation.
Here we knit ourselves into a community,
here we hold one another in compassion,
here we remember that the work you have called us
to do, we do not do it alone.**

One: Come let us worship God.

Sing – All are welcome

Verse 1

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live.
A place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace.
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

Refrain

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Verse 4

Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone.
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger bears the image of God's face.
Let us bring an end to fear and danger;

Refrain

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Verse 5

Let us build a house where all are named, their song and vision heard.
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace.
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter;

Refrain

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place

WELCOME

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with you all!

And also with you!

Opening prayer

One: Holy God, listen to your people praying for your presence with us, as we

gather in worship and praise,

All: Holy God, listen to the people praying.

One: For your encouragement as we go out into the world, seeking to do your will,

All: Holy God, listen to the people praying.

One: For the unity that we find, as the many members of one Body,

All: Holy God, listen to the people praying.

One: For the guidance of your Holy Spirit in opening our hearts to hear one another in love,

All: Holy God, listen to your people praying. Amen.

Prayer of confession

God of glory, to you we give all praise, for your grace has surrounded us from before the beginning, and by your grace we know that we are yours.

Yet all too often, we think that we alone belong to you, that we alone are your beloved, that we alone know the way to you. Too often, we exclude from grace those who seem different from us, those who use different words to speak of you or live their discipleship differently from us.

Forgive us, when we want Jesus' prayer to be just for us.

Forgive us, when we look for you in the heavens and refuse to see you on Earth.

Forgive us, when we dim your glory by putting limits on your love.

Forgive us, when we do not glorify you by loving you in all that you have created.

God of all, help us to feel the tenderness of your love, your hope for intimacy with us in our daily lives. Help us to live in the holy love of you, poured out in grace and mercy upon one another and all of creation. Amen.

Words of affirmation

One: Even when we cannot see, or touch, or hear the presence of the divine among us, we know that we belong to God. Just as God sent Jesus to walk with us long before the world was ready, so God forgives us even before we ask.

By grace, we are loved; by grace, we are forgiven.

ALL: Thanks be to God! Amen.

EARLY WORD – Where IS Jesus now?

Hello children and others listening in.

Well today is the last Sunday of the Easter season for 2020.

It is also a Sunday where we hear a reading about, well, where Jesus disappears into the clouds.

I know it sounds a bit unusual.

But this passage is describing Jesus' "ascension".

Ascension is a word that simply means "rise" or "go up". It is something we do when we walk upstairs or a hill, or use an escalator or elevator. In all these things we ascend.

As it happens the Thursday before the last Sunday of Easter each year is called Ascension Day when churches around the world celebrate Jesus' leaving earth and heading on up to be with God.

Because we don't usually worship on Thursday we sometimes celebrate Ascension Day on the Sunday after. Now we aren't really doing that today, but we are having the reading where Jesus ascends into the clouds...yes I know a bit unusual.

So I thought I would talk with the children about this, because this passage is a kind of answer to the question that children often have about Jesus – where is Jesus now?

And this is what the passage tells us-

When they were together for the last time they asked, "Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?"

He told them, "You don't get to know the time. Timing is the Father's business. What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world."

These were his last words. As they watched, he was taken up and disappeared in a cloud.

Yes this seems kind of strange, but this was how they thought of it way, way back then. But what this story simply means is that Jesus' life walking around on the earth is over, but he lives with God and continues to love the whole world from there, wherever that actually is. As he left, he clearly passed the job to his disciples – and to us-to keep doing the work he did while he was on earth.

I want to show you a few images that artists have painted to describe in their way how they imagined the Ascension of Jesus to look like.

The first is by an artist called John Copely who painted his "Jesus' ascension to heaven in 1775.



You can see in this the disciples gathered around, a couple of angels and of course Jesus rising up.

Here is another one by Hans Suss von Kulmbach in 1513, and it might be considered a bit funny with Jesus' feet dangling in the air above the heads of the disciples.



Again you can the two angels in white in the picture along with the disciples.

This next one is by an artist who lived in the 1900's and this was painted in 1958, a year before I was born. He was Salvador Dali and as you can see his style of painting was very different to the first two. This is one of a series of paintings of Jesus that Dali saw in a dream, and in all of them you can't see Jesus' face.



This last one is very different again, done in an abstract style by Jos Luiz Bentez who was alive until 2001. This is his version of Jesus' ascension.



I guess the point of showing these paintings is to understand that people see the story in different ways and we can't really know what it looked like at the time. But the idea of the story as I said earlier is that Jesus has physically left the earth and is now with God, but that Jesus has left behind if you like the Spirit, or Holy Spirit, to be there for support and comfort as the disciples get on with the work Jesus left them to do.

Maybe you might like to read the story for yourself and draw or paint a picture of it as you imagine it. If you do, I would love it if you could send me a copy to show everyone. For now let's finish with a prayer.

Dear God, we thank you for Easter and all the stories we have heard this Easter. We thank you for Jesus, and we ask that you help us to do our best at carrying on the work of Jesus in ways that we can. Amen.

SHARING OUR STORIES

READINGS:

Acts 1:6-14

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But 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." ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They 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."

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

John 17:1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

PREACHING – How then shall I live? - With all my relations.

(Text supplied below.)

These readings today are timely as it is the week of prayer for Christian unity 2020 beginning today.

John particularly speaks to this theme.

It is true this passage speaks to us of unity, but it does so in what I think is a bit of a confusing manner.

Let's face it, there are times when the author of John is less than clear and confuses us with repetition, irony, themes and sub-themes, signs and pointers, and interwoven ancient Greek philosophies.

So I am going to take a liberty here, and retell the passage and see if that helps us some more. Here goes.

Father, things are happening now, my time is almost done. Bring me back into your presence that I may give this eternal life to those I know, namely that they may know you as God, and that you sent me.

What I mean is I came to bring the offer of life. Which is being in a knowing relationship with God. This life I bring is life in relationship with God, me, other people, all things.

What you have had with me these past few years, is what you can have with God. But it won't stop there. After I'm gone, my helper will assist you to take this offer to the whole world.

But know this! This relationship is one of love, just like the relationship which exists between God and me.

So this relationship of love must be also among all of you; otherwise you have missed my point completely.

I want the closest relationship with God possible, and I want it for you too. This is what I am asking for. It is OK to ask for this. But it is not a commodity, a thing to be picked up at any stall in any market place. It is to be strived for and nurtured. It is nothing less than my hope for communion – that all may be one.

Not bad words at all if I say so myself for the start of the week of Christian Unity. Not bad at all.

But let me, as usual, say some things about the wider context of these words.

The first is a reminder of things I have said these past weeks as we have dabbled in John during this Easter season.

Struggling to maintain their identity after being essentially thrown out of the synagogue, the author of John was attempting to give courage and hope to people who found themselves in the midst of a very nasty fight with their Jewish neighbours in the synagogue. Their survival as a community of faith and their individual security and safety were very much on the line.

So a prayer uttered from the mouth of Jesus that this community be united in all they think and do through bonds of love, speaks to the reality of their circumstances.

They need to stick together to deal with all that is coming their way.

Again, the words speak to the disciples in the story as Jesus addresses them in his final farewell speech to them, the words also speak to the community to whom the author John, writes, and the words seep through the centuries to likewise speak to us on this particular day.

They are words spoken in love to despairing followers seeking to not merely survive, but to flourish.

And as I have said previously this is a major point of John's gospel, namely, I give life in abundance.

The same emphasis is present here.

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

This is eternal life.

A quality of life lived in the here and now not a thing to come in the hereafter.

Not a thing achieved by following rules and laws.

Not something garnered through an intellectual exercise of what you believe.

Eternal life is knowing God.

Not knowing about God, or things related to God, or being able to rattle off information about God.

Knowing God.

Eternal life consists in the relationship, with God and Jesus, just as in their relationship with each other, one that is infused and suffused with love.

This is the essence of the prayer Jesus offers in this passage.

I want them to have life, life in abundance, eternal life, right now, a life filled to the brim with love overflowing out to the world.

In this way, the desire “that they may be one as we are one” might find its fulfilment.

Phew, that was a lot of things to say.

Awhile ago I was talking to a friend of mine, who attends a more modern expression of church based around a café model. He commented that they go there largely for their children. He expressed his frustration that if they go on one more time about love being the central aspect of the faith he might well leave. He wants something more substantial to chew on. I like my friend, but he lives faith in his head.

He has kind of missed the point, God love him.

All the talking and thinking in the world won't bring about unity.

A conscious decision to love others, despite their difference to you, and their weirdness in your eyes, is the way to “being one as we are one”.

And that's the thing.

That-is-the-thing.

In another place, Jesus calls his followers not merely to love those who love you, your friends and family, but your enemies too, and those who curse you and hate you and persecute you and use them for their own ends. Pray for them and love them.

This is why unity, among different Christian expressions, doesn't work.

Because people aren't committed to it.

They don't take seriously the need to make a commitment to becoming one, and doing the things that make it happen.

And do you know the one thing above all else that makes this happen?

Apart from the love thing of course.

Spending time together.

It is either going to drive both sides crazy, or allow you to find a way forward.

The element that finds the way forward is love.

The love that says – roll away your stone, I'll roll away mine. I will work hard to love you despite our differences and the things you do I don't understand, and the ways of yours that are different to mine, and I will ask you if you might be able to love me in the same way.

But let us not be naive.

This is hard stuff.

Not the loving the other who is different.

But making myself vulnerable that they might love me.

I think this is a big factor in the way forward for our churches all across this land.

I know all too well we spend precious little enough time with churches of our own denomination let alone churches that go by different names to ours.

But it is the way forward too in international and political affairs around the world.

This horrific pandemic has united the world in ways unexpected. But it has also raised much ugliness.

White Australians have been abusing people of Chinese appearance and screaming at them to go back where they came from.

China is now at odds with many nations at present because everyone needs someone to blame, so much so that some have claimed the virus was cooked up in a Chinese laboratory and let loose, or escaped due to negligence. It doesn't actually solve anything, but is fairly typical human behaviour.

And this is because, let's face it, they don't know us and we don't know them. Yes we might know some Chinese people who live here, but largely we don't know nor understand the Chinese, nor they us. We are at odds because we only see the differences.

And when it comes to the religious aspect of this issue of unity, the problem arises because we tend to hold to a belief that eternal life consists of what we believe about God, not how we know that God.

Because I know without any doubt, that this God, when we truly know this God and the essence of this God, we understand that God despairs of our petty hatefulness born of our ignorance.

Because it flies in the face of what God, especially God in Christ, wants for us – life in abundance.

Friends, this unity Jesus asks for us is possible.

We just need to choose it.

And then make the time to spend time with those of difference to you, and listen to each other, with loving ears.

In concluding it is useful to note the second part of the Acts passage, when the angels challenge the disciples to stop gazing longingly and get on with it, and then reconvene back in Jerusalem, drawing the community back together, and continuing the work left to them by Jesus.

This same counsel is given to us: we have work to do right here responding for instance to global climate change, praying for the liberation of kidnapped children around the world sold into slavery, working for equality for all persons, closing the gap between the wealthy and the poor, and bringing beauty to our daily relationships.

We often feel too small to take on the challenges of the day. I am sure Jesus' first followers had second thoughts about their ability to carry on Jesus' mission. But, we are not helpless and alone. God's Spirit is with us, and God has given us power to be agents of healing and creative transformation in our time.

And John's Jesus wants us to know we are in God's heavenly realm whenever we attend to God's vision and know God as our deepest reality.

*We are given the task of claiming and following the power and guidance of the Spirit. We can become agents of divine reconciliation, bringing earth to heaven and heaven to earth. (Bruce Epperly, *The Adventurous lectionary*)*

Friends,

When you despair that your life is small or insignificant,
 when you grieve that your life is troubled or a mess,
 when you doubt your life's benefit to the universe,
 remember that no matter your faults,
 regardless of your disappointments,
 you are more than this one individual flesh:
 you are a part of this vast, wondrous humanity,
 this glorious Creation,
 that you are part of God's healing of the world,
 and know that your life, your whole life,
 is wonderful, beautiful, and worthy,
 holy, and belonging to God...
 and give thanks.

Sing – How then shall I live?

1.
 Took a walk outside of my walking. Stepped inside another's shoes.
 Walked the dusty borders between us. Paths I'd never chosen to choose.

*How then shall I live? How then shall I live?
 How then shall I live, O God? How then shall I live?*

2.
 Heard a sound outside of my list'ning. Felt the living hum of the ground.
 Waited on the voice of the spirit, singing with its new old sound.

*How then shall I live? How then shall I live?
 How then shall I live, O God? How then shall I live?*

3. Saw the world outside of my looking. Gazed upon the eyes of its soul.
 Held the hopes and fears of tomorrow, found the pieces making a whole.

*How then shall I live? How then shall I live?
 How then shall I live, O God? How then shall I live?*

4.
Took a step outside of my walking. Found within a beat that we share.
Walked with you the length of a lifetime, and made of life a living prayer.
How then shall I live? How then shall I live?
How then shall I live, O God? How then shall I live?

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (FROM THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA)

**We are not alone,
we live in God's world.
We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others
by the Spirit.
We trust in God.
We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God!**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE – read by Carol Parker.

All these words we bring in the name of the Risen Christ who taught us to pray together, saying:
**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen**

Sing – TIS 411

1.

Filled with the Spirit's power,
with one accord
the infant church
confessed its risen Lord:
O Holy Spirit, in the church today
no less your power
of fellowship display.

2.

Now with the mind
of Christ set us on fire,
that unity may be our great desire:
give joy and peace;
give faith to hear your call,
and readiness in each to work for all.

3.

Widen our love,
good Spirit, to embrace
in your strong care
all those of every race:
like wind and fire
with life among us move
till we are known as Christ's
and Christians prove.

BLESSING –

Go out from this place full of the tenderness of Jesus' care for each one of us.
Go out into the world, carrying with you the abundance of God's grace and love,
and letting it overflow as blessings to the world.
Go; for Christ is out in the world, still calling us to life and love.
May the grace of Christ Jesus, and the love of God,
And the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you, today and always. Alleluia! Amen.

Sing – TIS 778

Shalom to you now,
shalom, my friends.
May God's full mercies
bless you, my friends.
In all your living
and through your loving,
Christ be your shalom,
Christ be your shalom.