

29th May 2022 – Morning Service

Sunday in Ascensiontide

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship

Psalms 68:32-33: You kingdoms of the world, sing praises to God, make music to the Lord, to him who rides on the heavens, the highest heavens.

StF 340 – Ye Servants of God

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| 1) Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
And publish abroad his wonderful name;
The name all-victorious of Jesus extol;
His kingdom is glorious, and rules over all. | 3) 'Salvation to God who sits on the throne!'
Let all cry aloud, and honour the Son;
The praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,
Fall down on their faces, and worship the Lamb. |
| 2) God ruleth on high, almighty to save;
And still he is nigh, his presence we have;
The great congregation his triumph shall sing,
Ascribing salvation to Jesus our King. | 4) Then let us adore, and give him his right:
All glory and power, all wisdom and might,
All honour and blessing, with angels above,
And thanks never-ceasing, and infinite love. |

Charles Wesley

CCL No. 515642

Prayers

God our Lord and master, we, your servants, are here to worship you and acknowledge your sovereignty. We serve you with our words and thoughts and deeds as our act of devotion. Yet you call us who love and obey you not only servants but friends, and you share your heart and will and purposes with us. We stand in awe of your goodness in that you did not leave us in our sins but made provision for our redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ. You reconciled us to yourself and made us your family, sharing in your great and precious promises. Accept our worship in words and music and service and in our daily work and rest, for your praise and glory. Amen.

You have given the gift of life to all who receive it by faith in Jesus' righteousness.

Forgive us when we try to justify ourselves by our own works.

You have shown us what true love is.

Forgive us when our own lives are self-obsessed and inward-looking.

In the beginning you made everything perfect. Forgive us for the selfishness that has marred our home planet and distorted our relationship to the created order.

We hear the words of absolution: Our sins are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen.

StF 293 – All heaven declares

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| 1) All heaven declares
The glory of the risen Lord.
Who can compare
With the beauty of the Lord?
Forever He will be
The Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee
And worship Him alone. | 2) I will proclaim
The glory of the risen Lord.
Who once was slain
To reconcile us to God.
Forever You will be
The Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee
And worship You alone. |
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Noel Richards

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Reading: Isaiah 44: 1 - 8

“But now listen, Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen.

This is what the LORD says —

he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you:

Do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground;

I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring and my blessing on your descendants.

They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.

Some will say, ‘I belong to the LORD’; others will call themselves by the name of Jacob;

still others will write on their hand, ‘The LORD’s,’ and will take the name Israel.

“This is what the LORD says — Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty:

I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.

Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it.

Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come — yes, let them foretell what will come.

Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?

You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?

No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.”

Our next hymn reminds us that Jesus has been resurrected and that he has ascended into heaven and is glorified.

StF 312 – The head that once was crowned with thorns

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| 1) The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now;
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor's brow. | 4) To them the cross, with all its shame,
With all its grace, is given,
Their name an everlasting name,
Their joy the joy of heaven. |
| 2) The highest place that heaven affords
Is his, is his by right
The King of kings and Lord of lords,
And heaven's eternal light. | 5) They suffer with their Lord below,
They reign with him above,
Their profit and their joy to know
The mystery of his love. |
| 3) The joy of all who dwell above,
The joy of all below
To whom he manifests his love
And grants his name to know. | 6) The cross he bore is life and health,
Though shame and death to him;
His people's hope, his people's wealth,
Their everlasting theme. |

Thomas Kelly CCL No. 515642

We hear our Gospel passage now from Luke 24. It needs a little introduction to set it in context. The story takes place at one of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances to his disciples. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus has accompanied two people on their journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Without these two knowing who he is, he shows them how Scripture speaks of all that will happen to the Messiah, and eventually reveals his identity at the breaking of bread. These two then return quickly to Jerusalem to join the eleven and other disciples and to tell them what has happened, and Jesus appears to this larger group too and shows that he is alive and fully human.

Reading: Luke 24: 44 - 53

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

The Ascension of Jesus

When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Sermon

Last Thursday was Ascension Day, when the Church marks the going up of Jesus into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus' work is complete now that he has died and been resurrected. It seems to me that Ascensiontide marks a pivot point around which the emphasis of the biblical story changes. The earthly ministry of Jesus and his disciples has up until this point been largely based around Israel and the Jewish people. This should not be surprising as Jesus is Jewish and was called primarily to the people of Israel in his earthly ministry, but now Jesus talks about the gospel going forth to all the nations. In our passage from Luke's gospel, Jesus points to the gift promised by the Father, which is power from above. In doing so he references the Holy Spirit. John's gospel (in chapter 16) underlines this by recording a conversation between Jesus and his disciples about his ascension in which he says that his going away is actually to their benefit, because it will result in the Helper coming. This coming of the Spirit is what the Church will celebrate next week at Pentecost.

Ascension and Pentecost are therefore linked. You can't have the latter without the former, as Jesus explains that the Spirit will not be sent upon the disciples until he has ascended into heaven.

The Spirit's coming is linked with the spread of the gospel into all the world. In our gospel reading, Jesus has explained to the gathered disciples that the Hebrew Scriptures foretell the sufferings of Messiah and his rising on the third day, and that in his name repentance bringing the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

The gospel is therefore not confined to the Jewish people, but is for everyone, all who will respond to it. The story of the book of Acts is all about the gospel propagating throughout the Jewish lands and beyond, to Gentiles too. It's for us as well! We are now given the chance to be God's people and to inherit the promise given to Abraham that his descendants would bless all people on earth. The point that Jesus makes to his disciples, using the Hebrew Scriptures, is that this was God's plan from the beginning.

In Isaiah 44, written hundreds of years before Jesus came, God promises blessing to his people Israel through the pouring out of his Spirit. This reminds us of the promise in the prophet Joel (quoted by Peter in Acts chapter 2, which records the events of the day of Pentecost) that he would pour out his Spirit on all humanity.

In Isaiah 44:8 God states that his purposes were foretold long ago, and that there is no one like God. That's an important point. God speaks through his prophets. No one else but God himself can understand the full sweep of history and the future, and he uses his prophets to give direction to his people, and, where necessary, to declare in advance things that will happen later. Any other guidance that does not

come from God is therefore fake. We can certainly be aware of dangerous counterfeits in the world: astrological predictions, divination, spiritism, occult and new age practices and the like, which Christians should have nothing to do with! Only God can know the future thoroughly, and he gives his word to his prophets. Anything else is warned against by the Bible.

Jesus shows that the Scriptures from long ago pointed to him. It was important to Jesus that the disciples understood this. The life of Jesus was not simply some kind of random occurrence in history that started a new chapter and set aside the old. It was part of God's plan from the beginning, and God had told his prophets about it long ago so that we could see that there is a plan and purpose and continuity. This has two implications for us.

1. We are part of the fulfilment of prophecy, as we have believed in Jesus. Just as the prophets foretold, we are part of the "all nations" to which the gospel was to go.
2. We also have a task as witnesses, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to what God has done. This does not mean that every Christian is called to be a Billy Graham-style evangelist, nor that we should all do a theological degree so that we can communicate well with others. It does mean that each person who has come to know Christ is called to testify to what he has done in our lives. It means that people who know the Lord Jesus and love him are to be ready to share that good news with others around us. This, Jesus tells us, we can do effectively only in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It was important to Jesus that his disciples know and apply the Scriptures so that they could understand God's plans for the salvation of the world and their part in it. It is my belief that this is important for us too as Jesus' modern day disciples. It was also important to Jesus that his followers were endowed with power from above to enable them to do so. No doubt much more will be said about that from pulpits all over the nation on Pentecost Sunday next week!

Our next hymn is a prayer for the Holy Spirit to energise, revive and transform us as individuals and Church.

StF 391 – O breath of life

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| 1) O breath of life, come sweeping through us,
Revive your church with life and power;
O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
And fit your church to meet this hour. | 3) O Breath of love, come, breathe within us,
Renewing thought and will and heart;
Come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,
Revive your church in every part. |
| 2) O Wind of God, come, bend us, break us,
Till humbly we confess our need;
Then in your tenderness remake us,
Revive, restore; for this we plead. | |

Prayers of thanksgiving and Intercession

Bidding: Your kingdom come. Response: Your will be done.

Father of all life, we thank you that you have exalted your Son Jesus Christ to your right hand in heaven and seated us with him in heavenly places. In your grace you give us eternal life. May our lives reflect Christ's glory and holiness now and always. **Amen**

Lord, you exist outside of space and time and yet you act within them. You see all the nations and peoples of earth and understand the rise and fall of kingdoms. We pray that you bring justice to this world, especially where aggressive regimes throw their weight around. We pray for the poor and weak, that they will know the strength that you give. We pray for all who are working to relieve suffering and bring justice, and those working to preserve our natural world. Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

We pray for our own nation and government, especially for wise counsel in dealing with international relations and internal affairs. We pray that there will be compassion in government for those facing the high cost of living, with accompanying action to support them. Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

We pray for our own church and Circuit. Let your Holy Spirit fill every worshipper and guide our ministers and stewards. We pray for our Superintendent Alan on Sabbatical and our Acting Superintendent Helen. Guide us all together in the way forward, that we may be drawn closer to you and be better able to share the Gospel with a needy world and society. Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

We ask for your touch upon the lives of anyone in need, both within our congregations and outside of them, especially people who are unwell in mind or body, the bereaved, people facing difficult decisions or circumstances and those feeling anxious about the future. You are the God whose wisdom and generosity are all that we need, and we trust you to meet all needs according to your riches in glory. Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The 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.**

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 for ever. **Amen.**

We sing now a great hymn of praise linking the themes of ascension and the work of the Holy Spirit. In "Singing the Faith" it is set to the tune "Morning Light", known to many of us as the tune to "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross".

StF 315 – We sing the praise of Jesus

- 1) We sing the praise of Jesus,
Of our ascending Lord;
The triumph of our Saviour,
Of Christ the Son of God.
The forty days are over,
Earth sees his face no more;
But Christ the King of glory
We worship and adore.
- 2) Rejoicing in Christ's promise
We wait in prayer and praise,
The Spirit sent from heaven
To set the earth ablaze;
We pray with expectation,
We praise with one accord,
We wait for living fire,
The power of the Lord.
- 3) Therefore with saints and angels
And all the hosts above
We lift our hearts and voices
To bless the God of love;
To sing of our Redeemer
Who intercedes and prays,
That God the Holy Spirit
May guide us all our days.
- 4) With songs of alleluia
Let earth and heaven ring;
And praises to the Father
Let all creation sing.
All honour be to Jesus,
God's own eternal Son;
And to the Holy Spirit
Let endless praise be done!

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Blessing

May God, who resurrected and glorified our Lord Jesus Christ and exalted him on high, infuse us with new and vibrant life in the Spirit, that we may share that good news with those around us.
The blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us, now and forever. Amen.