

The Methodist Church

Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist

Circuit:

Worship at Home – 29 May 2022

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever you are sharing in this act of worship, you are welcome.

God has gone up with a shout,
the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Psalm
47: 5

Hymn: Jesus shall reign

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does its successive journeys run,
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

To him shall endless prayer be made,
and praises throng to crown his head.
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
with every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song,
and infant voices shall proclaim
their early blessings on his name.

Blessings abound where'er he reigns:
the prisoners leap to lose their chains,
the weary find eternal rest,
and all who suffer want are blest.

Let every creature rise and bring
the highest honours to our King,
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud amen.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (1.4-11)

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 baptised with water, but you will be baptised 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 towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards 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.'

Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.
Alleluia.

Hymn: The head that once was crowned with thorns
The head that once was crowned with thorns
is crowned with glory now;
a royal diadem adorns
the mighty victor's brow.

The highest place that heav'n affords
is his, is his by right,
the King of kings and Lord of lords,
and heav'n's eternal light:

The joy of all who dwell above,
the joy of all below
to whom he manifests his love
and grants his name to know.

To them the cross, with all its shame,
with all its grace, is giv'n;
their name, an everlasting name,
their joy, the joy of heav'n.

They suffer with the Lord below,
they reign with him above,
their profit and their joy to know
the myst'ry of his love.

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.

Reflection

I bang on a lot about doing all the parts of the story of how God deals with his people through the Church year. We are not good at marking Ascension Day. But to go straight from the Easter season to Pentecost without standing at the foot of a mountain with the disciples and experiencing an amazing, confusing yet soon to be life changing theophany, is as horrific as missing out Good Friday before Easter. Imagine reading a long novel you've got out of the library and you discover the pages of a crucial chapter have been ripped out. The rest of the plot doesn't make sense.

Ascension Day invites us to look up.

Have you ever tried to walk along a street in a busy city in rush hour? It's a dangerous thing to do. Why? Because people don't look where they are going because they are looking at a mobile phone as they walk along, so they are looking at vital stuff they need to know now. They aren't aware of what's around them at all, so they walk into the road not noticing the lights are on red, and they bump into people coming the other way.

I was watching a programme for teenagers about improving your mental health. Three teenagers were invited to not use social media for three days and to hand over all their devices. They struggled initially, but after a time, they began to appreciate things around them, some even began to have conversations with their family!

Part of our time on sabbatical was used to explore our local area a bit more. We are very blessed to live in such a beautiful part of the country. It's good to look up and see amazing vistas. It's good to look up and notice what we easily miss. A change of scene and a change of pace can be sources of healing. I love the sea and I miss living near it, so the occasional trip across the moors will be a regular treat. I do my best to do sermon preparation while walking outside. It clears my head, and gives me space. To look up is healthy.

It's so easy to get bogged down with the worries of the world. I watch people facing

hard stuff who need help who cannot find the help they urgently need because the resources aren't there. I look at the church worrying about how to keep going with falling numbers and an ageing demographic with little energy to do any more. Maybe we need to look up more else we will get shuffle along the ground and eventually we will fall over.

Luke has two versions of the Ascension. In Acts, the disciples stand staring at the sky, perplexed. An angel comes and tells them to stop staring. He points them to the hope of the parousia, and tells them to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the power from on high. His Gospel only has a few verses about Ascension. Jesus blesses the disciples, and as he blesses them, he is taken up into heaven. What's the disciples reaction? Not sadness or panic he has gone, but they return home with great joy and they spend a lot of time in praise and worship in the Temple.

My Anglican colleague, Ian Kitchen, has this helpful paragraph on his benefice Facebook page:

"The disciples' final image of the risen Jesus' time on earth would have been one of receiving his blessing and during that blessing, of seeing him return to his Father in heaven. What an amazing final picture that must have left in their minds. What a blessing after all their very human doubts, their failure to understand and their loss of hope and courage along the way. Jesus had never given up on them and had promised that they would not be left alone, but that he would send 'what my Father promised' – the 'power from on high' - his Holy Spirit to empower them for the mission that he had entrusted to them. In the times that lay ahead of them, how the disciples must have needed to remember this moment of 'great joy' when Jesus blessed them and moved into the reality of heaven."

I encourage us today to take time to look up. Where is God? Where's your thin place? Can you even with a huge load of problems, know there is a greater power about and can you as a result of that find that great joy those disciples found?

Barbara Brown Taylor in *Gospel Medicine* writes that Ascension Day, one of the most forgotten feast days of the church year, is the day that eleven people, with nothing but a promise and a prayer, consented to become the church.

For while they still stood with their necks cranked up, gobsmacked, wondering what the heck was going on. They were given the message: stop looking up, better to look around instead, at each other, at the world, at the ordinary people in their lives, because that was where they were most likely to find Christ, not the way they used to know him, but the new way, not in his own body, but in their bodies, the risen, the ascended Lord who was no longer anywhere on earth so that he could be everywhere instead.

Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you have exalted your Son Christ Jesus to your right hand, and made him the head over all things for his body the Church: hear us as we pray for the Church throughout the world.

Make us and all your people receptive to the gifts he pours upon us, that we may use them to your glory, and the building up of the body of Christ.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Lord God Almighty, the Ancient of Days, you have given your Son all authority in heaven and on earth: hear us as we pray for the world he came to redeem.

Grant that we may know even in this time the things that make for peace, and may strive for the reconciliation of all people in his kingdom of justice and love.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Father of all, whose Son has promised to be with us always, to the end of the age: hear us as we pray for those among whom we live and work.

Grant that we may be so aware of his presence with us, that people may take note of us, that we have been with Jesus.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

O God our Redeemer, whose Son ever lives to make intercession for us: hear us as we pray for those in any kind of need.

May he who has borne our infirmities strengthen and heal them, that they may find grace to help in time of need, and rejoice in his salvation.

Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, whose Son has borne our humanity into the heavenly realms, and gone before us to prepare a place for us: hear us as we remember before you those whose earthly sojourn is over, and whose life is now hidden in him with you.

Make us joyful and expectant, that at his coming with all his own we too may go forth to meet him, and share in his eternal joy. Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn: The Servant King

From heav'n You came, helpless Babe,
Entered our world, Your glory veiled;
Not to be served but to serve,
And give Your life that we might live.

This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow Him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.

There in the garden of tears,
My heavy load He chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but Yours,' He said.

Come see His hands and His feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice;
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered.

So let us learn how to serve,
And in our lives enthrone Him;
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving.

God the Father, who has given to his Son the name above every name, strengthen you to proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord. Amen. God the Son, who is our great high priest passed into the heavens, plead for you at the right hand of the Father. Amen. God the Holy Spirit, who pours out his abundant gifts upon the Church, make you faithful servants of Christ our King. Amen.