

Service for Sunday 24th May 2020 – Revd Pauline Crispin

Lord of Lords, Prince of Peace, King of Kings, for your greatness that fills the cosmos, your power and majesty, holiness and righteousness, justice and mercy, **we praise you.**

For the way you have brought our world into existence, the way you have worked through history, the way you have shared our humanity, and the way you continue to build your kingdom, **we praise you.**

Lord of all, forgive us that we have not lived our lives to the full. We have taken its wonder for granted, we have failed to appreciate its potential, and we have lost sight of the abundant, eternal life you offer. For offering us life despite all that, **we praise you. Amen**

Here are words that are true, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

To those who fall by the wayside he reaches out a hand.

Let us learn to forgive ourselves and one another Let us feel that peace. **Amen.**

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

This is one of the set readings for this Sunday. How relevant it is for our current situation! As the world journeys through this pandemic, maybe we can find some comfort in knowing, that we, too, are united in our suffering. We never suffer alone.

The writer wants to remind them and us that we are not alone in suffering. He writes: "for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering" (1 Peter 5:9).

This letter of Peter frequently mentions persecution and suffering. This is also, as you see, a feature of today's reading. It is, the writer reminds us, a sharing in the sufferings of Christ himself. Nevertheless, we are also told, if we are to share Christ's sufferings we shall also share his glory (4.14; 5.10). We might get the impression from our other reading that at the ascension Christ goes off to be in glory with God, His Father, leaving us behind. That is not the case. Glory is our destination too. Mission is our business for the time being, and that may involve pain as well as joy, but Christ's will for us is that eventually we shall be with Him. At Jesus' birth He became as we are, so that at last we should become as He is. We and every follower share not only the risen life but also the ascended life of Christ.

God of love let me know your love for me.

Let me know you hold me.

**Let me know with you I can be strong.
Teach me to cast my cares on you.
Teach me to trust. Amen.**

Luke 24:44-53

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

We pray

Lord, we remember today how your disciples stood gazing into heaven, anxious and confused, fearing they had lost you, struggling to make sense of their experience.

Open our eyes to your glory.

We remember how in the days following your Ascension they remained hidden behind locked doors, bound by the weakness of their imagination, tied down by the feebleness of their vision, restricted by the smallness of their faith. **Open our eyes to your glory.**

Instead of worshipping you as King of kings and Lord of Lords, they thought you had gone from them. Instead of rejoicing at your exaltation, they felt they were separated from you once again. **Open our eyes to your glory.**

Despite what they had been told, they looked still for the man they knew and understood. We make the same mistake as the disciples, we expect you to fit in with our own expectations, we assume we know all there is to know about you, we settle for a comfortable, cosy picture of you that offers much and asks little; and when that way of thinking is challenged or threatened, we are puzzled, suddenly overcome by a multitude of questions. **Open our eyes to your glory.**

Forgive us that our horizons have been too narrow, our sights set too low, our expectations too limited. **Open our eyes to your glory.**

Help us to glimpse the wonder of who you are and the untold possibilities of all you can do, catching our breath in awe and captured by a new vision of your kingdom.

Open our eyes to your glory, for we ask it in your name. Amen.

Sing or read:

Open Our Eyes, Lord,
We want to see Jesus,
To reach out and touch Him
And say that we love Him.

Open our ears, Lord,
And help us to listen.
Open our eyes, Lord,
We want to see Jesus.

Word for today

Thursday this week was Ascension Day it is when we recall the moment Christ goes back to His home and to His Father. The ascension is a marker. It seals off the 40 days, since Easter, during which Jesus made appearances to his followers and it introduces a new phase in his relationship with them. In this new stage, the inference is that they could no longer expect to see him in the same way. The presence of the risen Christ in the flesh is to be exchanged by the continual presence of the Holy Spirit.

It is cause for celebrations! Our worship today is a faint echo of the reception Christ receives in paradise on his return. When celebrating Christ's Ascension we can, without restraint, bring our praises. Let the focus be not on our needs and wants, but on Christ. It's His day! Don't get stuck on worrying about 'what actually materially happened' and the way that Luke describes and illustrates the event, both in his gospel and in the book of Acts. This is an important story for Luke. Luke uses it as a pivotal moment, both to close his Gospel and to begin the story of Acts. He wants us to be clear that the work of the bodily, tangible Christ is complete and the work of the Church is just beginning. It ends the resurrection appearances and sets the scene for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and the birth of the Church.

In both of Luke's stories, Christ commissions the followers to be his witnesses, starting from where they are and moving out 'to the ends of the earth'. That commissioning is ours, too. Today, do not feel it as a burden but receive it as an incredible privilege and honour.

As you consider today's readings, you may note that the actual ascension is mentioned only very briefly. Jesus took the disciples for a walk 'as far as Bethany', just on the far side of the Mount of Olives, there He blessed them and left them, being 'carried up into heaven.' The emphasis throughout is not on what was happening to Jesus, but on what He was and still is expecting of His followers! Our eyes, minds, and hearts are once again opened in order to receive the Holy Spirit, our comforter and our guide.

There is no power without a season of preparation, without a period of waiting. May we be empowered to do the work of the Lord as we are reminded, that this promised gift of God's presence will always be worth the wait.

Let us pray:

We thank you that through His Ascension Jesus was set free to be Lord of all, no longer bound to a particular place or time, but with us always and able to reach to the ends of the earth.

We thank you that through His departing Jesus prepared the way for his coming again, through his Spirit, his Church, and His coming again in glory.

Almighty God, forgive us for so often failing to grasp the wonder of Ascension, for living each day as though it had never been. Forgive the smallness of our vision, the narrowness of our outlook, the feebleness of our love, the nervousness of our witness, our repeated failure to recognise the fullness of your revelation in Christ.

Give us a deeper sense of wonder, a stronger faith, and a greater understanding of all you have done.

To hold firm to the one great truth that the wonder of Christ goes far beyond anything we can ever imagine, and in that faith may we live each day. **Thanks be to God! 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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.**

- 1 All heaven declares
the glory of the risen Lord ;
who can compare
with the beauty of the Lord ?
For ever 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.
For ever you will be
the Lamb upon the throne ;
I gladly bow the knee,
and worship you alone.

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Lord, may your glory be seen in what I do and who I am. Amen.

The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love this day and forever more. Amen

