

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches**  
**Team Ministry worship for individuals or families**  
**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2020 at 10:30 am.**

**7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter – Ascension Sunday**



**Welcome**

Today is Ascension Sunday – the least celebrated festival in the Christian calendar. We come today and the question is asked as Jesus is taken up, ‘Why do we stand here staring up into the sky?’ Yes, let us celebrate Christ’s glory, but this is about those of us who are left behind and we have work to do.

**Call to Worship**

Ascending Christ, returning to your beginning, you take the joy and the anguish of human struggle into the presence of God. Help us to walk in Jesus’ footsteps. Make us ready to receive your Holy Spirit. Come now as we worship separated and held together in your love. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

**Hymn R&S 289**

**To God be the glory**

To God be the glory! Great things He has done!  
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son;  
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin, and opened the life-gate that all may go in.  
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the earth hear His voice!  
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the people rejoice!  
O, Come to the Father, through Jesus the Son:  
Give Him the glory! Great things He has done!

**Prayers of Approach. Confession and Thanksgiving**

Risen and ascended Christ, we come to you in this time of challenge.  
We come as you call us to follow your way and your teachings.  
You surround us with witnesses and send us the Holy Spirit  
who opens our minds to understand your teaching.

We give you thanks and praise  
Bless us with such grace that our lives may become a blessing for the world  
now, and in the time to come. Our God, Our Creator,  
your ascended Son promised the gift of holy power.

Send your Spirit of revelation and wisdom, that in the blessed freedom of hope,  
we may witness to the grace of forgiveness.

We say we are sorry for the times when we have failed to worship you in spirit and in truth.  
For the times we have thought about ourselves and not others.  
When we refuse to lift up our eyes to see you  
and to open our ears and hear your wonderful commission,  
and so our lives fail to speak of you and our actions fail to show your love.

On this the day of your ascension, a day of glory, draw us to yourself.  
Forgive us, heal and empower us.  
Draw us into your life and your work so that we may draw others, too,  
to love and praise and live for you.  
These prayers we bring together in the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples.....

### **The Lords' Prayer**

Reading                      Psalm 47

**Song                      He is exalted**

He is exalted the King is exalted on High  
I will praise Him  
He is exalted forever exalted; and I will praise His name  
He is the Lord  
Forever His truth shall reign; Heaven and Earth  
Rejoice in His holy name; He is exalted the King is exalted on high

Reading                      Luke 24:44 - 53

### **Reflection**

Today is known as Ascension Sunday. Ascension Day is usually celebrated on Thursday as marks the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Easter, when Jesus is taken up to heaven. No doubt you recall that throughout the scriptures 40 is a significant number. I would like you to bring to mind a story in the Bible associated with the number 40. As you remember the story think about how it ends... So our reflection this morning comes in three parts, beginning, a middle and an end (but it is really a beginning).

In the Gospel reading we are told the story of Jesus being taken up into heaven and we would be thinking that this is the end of the story. But in fact it is the beginning, as we begin our preparation to receive a gift... and over the next seven days we will be encouraged to listen to the instructions as to how to receive the gift. So today we are also going to 'remember and prepare'.

Let's not stand there staring up in to the sky. We have work to do!

Our story starts from Jesus' birth, teaching in the temple, calling the disciples, his crucifixion and resurrection and the various times Jesus appeared to his disciples and then his glory is revealed as he returns to his Father.

The birth of Jesus, proclaimed. The shepherds were given the news of great joy and they went and shared it with everyone they met. Jesus as a young child teaches and answers questions in the Temple. He chooses a scroll to read and it paints the picture of his ministry (Read Isaiah 61:1-4).

He calls his disciples and he has a number of faithful followers who learn about a new way of living. He teaches, he demonstrates compassion and love and he tells them stories

illustrated through parables. For his followers, the day he was crucified would have seemed like the end, especially when they heard the words 'It is finished'.

The women's witness of the empty tomb is associated with an act of remembering. Though remembering is often associated with death, it is at the same time a life-affirming action. To be remembered enables life to be continued in a way. When we conduct funerals we may have a section for memories. It is as though we have to look back in order to move ahead.

I think it is significant that the gospel writer states: "Then they remembered his words." After remembering what Jesus had taught them, the women at the tomb realized that he, indeed was not dead.

Even after his death, Jesus continues to teach his disciples. On the way to Emmaus, the two disciples encounter the risen Christ. Jesus shares the stories in the scripture. After Jesus blesses and breaks the bread "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished."

When Jesus appears to his disciples again, he reminds them of the words and stories that he told them while he was with them. They are instructed to remember Jesus' teaching "opens their minds to understand the scriptures." Remembering can open our eyes and minds. This was all done in preparation for the opening of their hearts in order to receive the Holy Spirit.

The disciples had to cope with letting go; just when they thought they had got him back (from the dead). There are so many points in our lives when we have to let go. In our current situation of 'lock down'. How many things have we had 'to let go' during this time? Life is full of beginnings and endings

COVID -19 is life changing and a life shaping event, which will require that we have to let go of the familiar. For most people it will be the start of something and for others the things that they used to do will come to an end (and perhaps a new beginning). For me it is the loss of the ability to share a smile – while doing retail therapy. I don't always buy something but I do get the opportunity to smile and say hello to a lot of people.

Let us come to the future. At the moment none of us know what the future hold and we have coined the phrase- the 'new normal'. If we are honest we don't know what that looks like. We can all surmise, that one thing for sure life will never be the same again. Lots of people are hoping that things will change for the 'better' and others are hoping that something good will come out of this very difficult time.

So in preparing for this new normal Jesus leaves us with some specific instructions -:

1. Remain faithful to his teaching and wait...
2. The gift of the Holy Spirit will come and bring peace (Shalom), wholeness and a future.

So, as we wait to receive this gift we need pray and ask that each one of us, and those around us will experience the presence of God in their lives. Amen

## Prayers for Intercession

Today, O God, we look back and look forward: back to the ministry and passion of your Son Jesus, fulfilling the words of ancient scriptures, back to his glorious resurrection, his assurance of life's triumph over death; and forward to the Church's earliest years, to challenges made and lives turned round.

We pray for the wisdom and courage we need in this time of challenge to be your witnesses in today's world.

Through the gift of your Holy Spirit grant us the insight to be true to Jesus' life and teaching, and the compassion to bring good news to people near and far.

We pray for those who can be strangely silent and distant:  
the sick... the poor... homeless.... lonely and isolated... weak  
those who are vulnerable and those who are shielding  
those who have lost loved ones... refugees... asylum seekers.... those who are still in slavery... those who have been victims of crimes.

We pray for our world – places where your word and your love is needed...

We pray for our churches, that they may become places of solace, welcome and of nourishment: For our homes, that they be places where your name is lifted up, where you are the silent guest each time food is shared and the listener to conversations which are pleasing to your ear.

Take now our cares and concerns for (*name those you are concerned about here*) ...and help us to stand with them in their time of need.

So with the Son and the Holy Spirit, may your name be glorified now and always.

## Hymn R&S 252

## Hail the day

Hail the day that sees Him rise, Alleluia!  
To His throne above the skies, Alleluia!  
Christ, awhile to mortals given, Alleluia!  
Re-ascends His native heaven, Alleluia!

There the glorious triumph waits, Alleluia!  
Lift your heads, eternal gates, Alleluia!  
Christ hath conquered death and sin, Alleluia!  
Take the King of glory in, Alleluia!

## Blessing

May the God known of old in clouds of glory,  
and the Christ who suffered and rose from the dead,  
make us faithful witnesses to the truth; and the blessing of God all-loving,  
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, be with us all today and for evermore.