



St Stephens Williamstown Uniting Church in Australia
Service of the Word at Home - during Coronavirus Lockdown
Seventh Sunday of Easter 24th May 2020

Prepared by Peter Kofoed

Lectionary Gospel Reading for Wednesday 21st May 2020 - Ascension Day:
Luke 24:44-53

Lectionary Readings for Sunday 24th May 2020:

Acts 1:1-14; Psalm 68:1-10,32-35; 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11; John 17:1-11

A gathering prayer

Mighty God, we gather in humility to worship you. Caring God, we bring to you our concerns.
Glorious God, we exalt your holy name.

Unite us – make us one in you, that your love may strengthen and empower us.

Amen.

A prayer of approach

Lord of all glory, we come before you seeking your wisdom,
that we may glorify you through our thinking; seeking your love,
that we may glorify you through our emotions; seeking your strength,
that we may glorify you at all times; seeking your perseverance,
that we may glorify you in all places. Show us how to live,
that our lives shine with your glory, and those who encounter us may know you
and that you are at work in your world. **Amen.**

A prayer of confession

When our actions are not loving, and we think of just ourselves –
your name is not glorified. **Forgive us, God of Glory.**

When our words bring hurt to others and we do not even notice –
your name is not glorified. **Forgive us, God of Glory.**

When the way we live is selfish and we find no time for you –
your name is not glorified. **Forgive us, God of Glory.**

When we do not see you or reveal your love –
your name is not glorified. **Forgive us, God of Glory.**

Forgive and renew us, and let your glory be seen in our lives.

Amen.

A prayer of adoration

God of majesty and might, your glory shines throughout the universe:
from the highest heaven to the deepest sea; in all the creatures you have made;
in the seasons that shape our living. Your glory shines through who you are
and through what you do.

The power of your glory touches your creation and exalts it.

To you we offer our worship; to you we offer our praise;

before you we come in adoration. **Amen.**

Suggested Hymn – Tell out, my soul (TIS 161) You tube link (Music, Singing, Words) :-

<https://youtu.be/qf3mqRUZkAk>

Bible readings :

Gospel reading **Luke 24:44-53**

New Testament reading **Acts 1:1-14**

Reflection: The Ascension

Last Thursday May 21st is designated in the Church calendar as Ascension Day. We have heard in our readings today that Jesus' ascension occurred 40 days after His resurrection. Hence the choice of last Thursday as the day to particularly remember the Ascension of Jesus. The commentary on the reading from Acts in "Love to the World" gives two conflicting impressions of the Ascension story. One impression is that it is an inspired piece of poetry creating an image inspiring wonder while the other impression is that it is a clumsy attempt to tie up loose ends as the author moves away from the story of the resurrection to the story of the early church.

Certainly with the two readings today we see Luke's Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, finishing with the Ascension story, and the Book of Acts, telling of the early church starting with the Ascension story. As authorship of both this Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts is attributed to Luke, these two passages could be seen as providing a bridge from one to the other to produce a continuous story.

The Gospels of Matthew and John do not have any Ascension story and the Gospel of Mark just has a fleeting reference in Mark's final chapter, chapter 16, verse 19 – which reads "He was taken up into heaven and He sat at the right hand of God." This reference is part of the last 11 verses of Mark, which were not actually found in the earliest manuscripts of Mark, which could indicate that they were added much later. So it would seem that the Ascension story may be solely from Luke.

However the concept of the Ascension, along with the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, has become and remains a pillar in the creeds and dogma of Christianity. We can see this in the Nicene Creed as it concludes "On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end."

Luke also attempts to tidy up another loose end in today's passage from Acts where we read "So when they (the disciples) met together, they asked Him (Jesus)" "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Here we still have the disciples with the hope that Jesus (as the Son of Man) was coming to deliver on His apocalyptic preaching, as seen within all three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. This message was that the Son of Man was coming to earth to establish the kingdom of God, sit in judgement to sort the sheep from the goats, and send the non-righteous to eternal punishment and give the righteous eternal life (see Matthew Chapter 25). And we read in Mark 13 verse 30 "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

The inference is that the disciples expected this judgement to happen in their lifetime, because that was what Jesus was telling them. Because it did not happen and Jesus had been crucified and then raised, they thought perhaps this would be the time when Jesus would establish the Kingdom of God. Hence their question - "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?". Luke does tidy this up by conveying Jesus' answer that "It is not for you (or us ?) to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority". This apocalyptic preaching, which may be seen as something that did not happen as expected, in Jesus time, is now seen as an on going Christian belief which has been enshrined in the Nicene creed, as we heard before – "He will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end."

So when this creed also declares "On the third day He rose again" what is it saying. Has Jesus been merely resuscitated? In the Gospel of Luke we hear of Jesus raising the son of the widow of Nain from the dead, and likewise in the Gospel of John, we hear of this happening to Lazarus. We are not told, but I would assume this means they came back to life and continued their life until they died at a later date. Had death just been postponed by means of resuscitation? May be so, but this is not the case for Jesus. Christian teaching tells us that

Jesus did not merely come back to life, but to a different life, a new life but importantly an eternal life.

How the concept of the Ascension and Resurrection is understood and believed (or not) by everyone does vary widely from total literal belief all the way to non belief. The theology is complex and confusing and probably is not always helpful.

Perhaps what may be helpful is to focus on that a Christian view of the resurrection , regardless of any particular theological view, is seen to be representing hope, hope of renewal and of new life, not just resuscitation of the old.

As we all try and manage all the ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic, we do look for hope, and that we shall survive and recover from it. But what will the recovery we hope for look like?

The world waits and hopes. Our Nation waits and hopes. Our community waits and hopes.

St. Stephens waits and hopes. But what are we waiting for?

Merely a resuscitation or perhaps a glorious resurrection?

Amen

Suggested Hymn – Make me a channel of your peace (TIS 607) You tube link (Music, Singing, Words) :-

<https://youtu.be/ihhvm6eLWZI>

Prayers of intercession

We bring before God our concerns for our world: where there is war we pray for peace; where there is sickness we pray for health; where there is despair we pray for hope.

Cast all your anxiety on him, **because he cares for you.**

We pray that you would be active in health care: in the work of doctors and dentists, psychiatrists and psychologists, nurses and administrators, pharmacists and researchers.

Cast all your anxiety on him, **because he cares for you.**

Guide our activity in the church: may we find ways to grow; may we always honour you; may we serve our communities.

Cast all your anxiety on him, **because he cares for you.**

We hold in your love those whom we love: those who are sick; those who are sorrowful; those who need guidance and direction.

Cast all your anxiety on him, **because he cares for you.**

Come to us, God of glory. Hear us, heal us and shine through our lives.

Cast all your anxiety on him, **because he cares for you.**

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us in the time of trial,

and deliver us from evil,

for the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Blessed God of All, grant that these gifts we offer for your ministry and service in the world, become action and intention, fulfilling Christ's commandments and the commandment to love. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen**

A sending out prayer

Go into the world to show God's glory, and may you always know God's blessing and God's peace.

Amen.

May the Peace of the Lord be always with you! **And also with you ... and you Amen**

Suggested Hymn – As the deer pants for water (TIS 703) You tube link (Music,Singing,Words)

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<https://youtu.be/a5pZkLWZv-E>

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