

COMFORT

in

North Carrick

Caring Observant Mindful Friendly Obliging Responsible Tactful

Providing comfort to the people of North Carrick at a time of crisis

Sunday 24th May 2020

We have just celebrated the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ and look forward to celebrating the gift of His Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

In the Gospel reading for Ascension day we are told Jesus says to his disciples, "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." Luke 24:49

Luke 24:52-53 continues, "And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God."

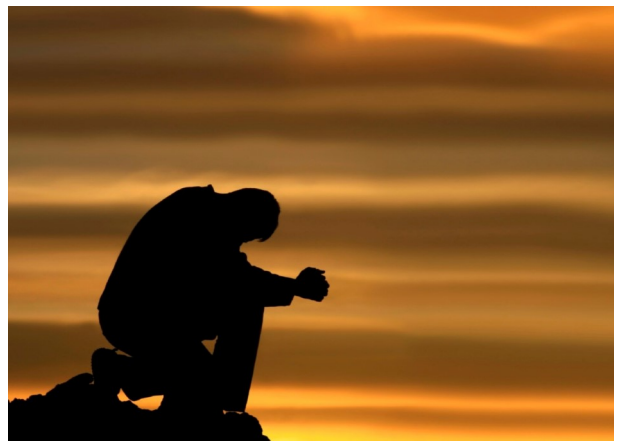
On this 7th Sunday of Easter, the first reading from the Acts of The Apostles says, "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers."

Some commentators liken this time, between the Ascension and Pentecost, as the followers of Jesus being in retreat. Filled with the joy of seeing the risen Lord ascended and glorified they await the gift of the Holy Spirit who will guide them in their mission.

They prepare by spending time in prayer and worship.

In this time of separation from our family in Christ, we too are experiencing a form of retreat. We are separated from many of the normal things that bring distraction into our lives, and are able to focus on our relationship with Christ and what sharing in His love and compassion means for our mission in life, as individuals and as Church.

As we begin to emerge from our isolation into a changed world, where will the Holy Spirit guide us? What renewal will we have experienced in our time of retreat?



This strange time has given us an opportunity to pause and look afresh at what is important in our lives and in the world we inhabit.

May the Holy Spirit guide us in this time of separation, of retreat, and encourage us in our mission to serve those around us and be faithful stewards of the world God has entrusted to our care.

Fr. Jim

St Oswald's

A message from Lynne Rankin, Session Clerk of Maybole Parish Church

(adapted from COS website and the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Fair)

The book, *The Road Less Travelled* by M. Scott Peck, rapidly became a best seller when it was published in 1978. It spent 13 years on the New York Times bestseller list, to create a paperback record, selling 10 million copies worldwide and was translated into more than 20 languages.

The opening words are, 'Life is difficult.' don't think anyone living through the last 2 months of lockdown in Scotland would disagree with that statement. 'Life is difficult'.

But one thing that has helped me and others in our church, get through this difficult time, is our faith. Yet I found myself this week realising I had been taking that faith for granted. From last Sunday's televised church services and ministers' chat on social media I reflected how complacent I had become about my faith – expecting it always to be there and support me.

I got to thinking about those without that faith, and how hard and even more difficult, their lives must be. I began to recognise the true gift it is to 'believe'.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Fair writes – "The twenty-first of May 2020 is Ascension Day, meaning that most congregations will celebrate it on Sunday 24th May. Or will they? For some, it's recognised as a day of great significance in the Christian year; for others it will pass by without notice.

Can we and should we make something special out of Jesus' ascension? What's lost if we skip past it without a mention? Can we get from Easter to Pentecost without reference to Ascension?

In recent years, the 'Thy Kingdom Come' event has grown in importance and 2020 will be its fifth run. Brought into being with the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and styled as a 'global wave of prayer,' it runs each year from Ascension to Pentecost.

It's explicitly ecumenical and last year was celebrated by Christians from many streams and in 85 countries across the globe. Might it be a way for more congregations to more fully recognise the importance of Christ's ascending to glory?

When Jesus' earthly ministry came to what appeared to be an unexpected and abrupt conclusion, at first the 11 disciples appeared to have been abandoned. Their Master's daily support and encouragement had come to an end. What were they to do?

The clue to the ascension is that the physical presence of Jesus, which could only be present on earth in one place at a time, was going to be replaced through the gift of the Spirit, by His spiritual presence which could be present in every company and in every land across the entire world.

C.S. Lewis asserts that the ascension cannot be separated from the resurrection; his main point is that in Christ's resurrection and ascension we see the creation of a New Nature, similar in some ways to our temporal human natures, but also enduringly very different. "For the miracle of the ascension 'is an interference with Nature by the Supernatural Power' of God"

The first disciples witnessed both the risen Jesus and His ascension. And thus a new era was inaugurated in the Kingdom of God."

Living through this pandemic, have we had a glimpse of God's kingdom?

The news this week has reported on how 'nature' has started to heal the lethal wounds of our carbon omissions. City smog replaced with good clean air. A plethora of wildflowers has coloured our kerbs. But as life returns to "normal" what can we do to make the "new Normal" a cleaner, safer, kinder world to live in. What can we do to make Thy Kingdom Come?

Not taking our faith for granted is one step. Recognising just how amazing God's Grace truly is, is another. And bringing our friends, neighbours, families, and strangers to Him in prayer, can be a part of it too. As we travel from Ascension to Pentecost may we feel united by God's Holy Spirit, led by Christ our Saviour, and enfolded in the Father's love.

From Marguerite Hunter Blair, Chair of Our Lady and St Cuthbert's Parish Pastoral Council

The seventh Sunday of Easter can feel like a bit of an anti-climax. It is the Sunday after the feast of the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. This is definitely a time for celebration and action, but for the followers of Jesus it must have felt like the end of everything. The disciples must have felt bereft for a second time. On Easter Sunday, an angel tells the women at the tomb not to seek the living among the dead (Luke 24.5). The angel now tells the apostles not to keep on looking up to heaven, but to wait instead for his presence among them on earth. What they soon discover is that the Ascension of Jesus is not the end, it is the beginning. This is the start of their mission. And it is the same mission and responsibility which Jesus gives to his disciples that he also gives to you and me today. Jesus says to each of us; 'As the Father sent me, so I am sending you'. We must rise to this challenge. In these stressful times we can see God's love in action all around us every day. Let us pray that we can see God's love in our own daily actions.

In your quiet place of prayer reflect on the words of the hymn written by Gerard Markland:

I will be with you wherever you go.

Go now throughout the world!

I will be with you in all that you say.

Go now and spread my word!



From Rev Dr John Lochrie, Locum Minister at Crosshill and Maybole Parish Churches

Ascension Day comes 40 days after Easter, always on a Thursday. For many it is a rather strange event to observe, especially in these increasingly secular times when for many the spiritual world is irrelevant. For them the idea that Jesus went up into heaven seems ridiculous. After all it was Yuri Gagarin who apparently said on his return from the first manned voyage into space that he had looked for God up there but did not see Him.

The reality is that the words Luke used when describing the events of the Ascension were the only ones he could have used. In his day, the cosmology of Genesis was accepted 'scientific' knowledge of the way things were. The world was flat, above it was the Firmament and beyond that was heaven where God lived. If Jesus was taken to be with God than logically he had to go up.

Human understanding of things has changed since then. It has changed since the days of Galileo and Copernicus who showed that the earth was not the centre of the Universe but in fact revolved around the sun. Both were persecuted by the Church for their theories. It has changed too since 1859 when Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution, seen as a direct rebuttal of the Genesis story of Creation. Since then our understanding of the Universe has changed even more with further theories of 'the Big Bang' and a continually expanding universe.

All of this has at times been taken as clear proof that religion and faith have no meaning. But that is to miss the point completely. In its day, the Genesis account was a valid scientific theory. Later understanding has revealed its flaws to some extent, just as Darwin's theory has been shown not to be the answer to the problem of the origin of species that he hoped it would be. The criticism of Genesis often makes some jump to a false conclusion by assuming that it is an account of how the world was created, when in fact the Creation Story is really concerned with why.

With that in mind we can return to the Ascension. Here too we are concerned more with why than how. What really happened that day at Bethany was a transition. After the Resurrection the Risen Christ still appeared in his human form and was still constrained by the limitations of space and time. There, as he was taken from the disciples, he was set free to be with his followers wherever they might be.

That makes the Ascension vitally important for all Christian people at all times; for it is our assurance that we are never left to face life alone. That makes this day especially important as we continue in lockdown where we are more physically isolated from each other than we have ever known before. Even now we are not alone. Jesus journeys with us through this time and as the story of the man walking on the beach with Jesus reminds us. When he turned to look back and saw only one set of footprints his complaint that he had been abandoned met with the reminder that it is now that when things are hard that we are carried.

Let us not then be put off by the language. We know heaven is not up there above the sky.

We simply have to accept that we are using words to try to describe the indescribable. Here we are dealing with faith, not science.

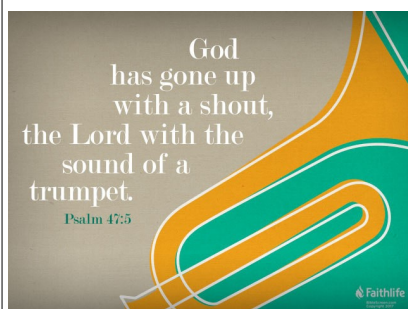


Hail the day that sees him rise

God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. – Psalm 47.5

Thursday 21st May is the 40th day of Easter and the day we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord. The Ascension marked the end of Jesus' 40 days of ministry following his resurrection and the event at which his disciples see him ascend to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. Just as Jesus was resurrected in body, he ascends bodily, physically, to heaven. Before his ascension he tells his disciples to wait in Jerusalem where they will receive the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. And when he gives his Great Commission instructing them to go and make disciples, he also tells them: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28.20).

So how is Jesus still with us if he physically ascends? Jesus is with us all as Christians and as the universal Church – the body of Christ. Paul says: 'And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.' (Ephesians 1.22-23). As I consider the words of Jesus and of Paul, my prayer is that we can follow the commission given to us and that in our own way live to be more Christ-like each day. I am reminded especially of these words, written by St Teresa of Avila:



*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.*

Matthew Wyllie

THE LORD IS KING!

The Ascension of Jesus Christ is celebrated on Ascension Day - the Thursday forty days after Easter. In the Bible, this is described in detail by St. Luke (Acts 1:1-11), using vivid and striking images, and marks both the end of Easter and the end of the 'resurrection appearances.' Indeed, the Ascension signifies our Lord's 'going away' from his disciples, and his return to the glory of the Father.

By virtue of the Ascension, Jesus is now understood to be seated at the right hand of God. This image is found in the New Testament: in the writings of St. Paul, and in The Apostles' Creed, where it is said of Jesus that he "sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty."

This is picture-language, thought to come from the custom of eastern kings to have their chief minister - "their right hand man" - standing or sitting at their right side. Strictly speaking, at a formal dinner today, the guest of honour should be seated to the right of the host. Take note next time you attend one!

The Ascension is a profound mystery, and not something that words can adequately describe.

One of the lessons of the Ascension is that we now have a precious friend in heaven - in God's very presence - who is our advocate and representative, and who continues to pray with us and for us. Though Jesus is 'with honour and glory crowned', and occupies heaven's highest place, he has neither forgotten nor abandoned us. As Professor William Barclay put it: "He is still mighty and powerful to help, and in his exalted royalty, he has not forgotten his own."

On this Sunday after Ascension Day, let this be a comfort and a blessing. For though we pass through dark valleys, and know not where we are going, we have a friend in God's presence, our living and glorified Saviour, a great high priest, who continues to uphold his people before the throne of God's grace. The Lord is King! Let us hold fast to the faith we profess!

Rev Gerald Jones

The last night Jesus spent with his disciples, he prayed for them, re-assuring them that they would not be left orphans but would be given another helper, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would enable them, and us, to remember all he had taught them and guide them in their prayer and service.

There are so many voices calling for our attention as we wander through life. At present we listen daily to how the corona virus is altering lives, intermingled with predictions about the future which can cause us anxiety or even fear. We often do not know what to think or perhaps how to pray. It's then that we can call on the help of the Holy Spirit to recall the teachings and promises of Jesus. We are not alone. As the people of God, we can be secure in the peace and joy of Christ, trusting that following his way of love is the only real way to live now, and in the future, whatever that may be.

In the midst of one of the world's most serious crises, we are truly blessed to know that it is through the power of the Holy Spirit working through us, that we can continue close to Jesus and his teachings and know that all will be well. St. Augustine tells us that 'God has ears for what your heart is saying. For just as we have ears for men's voices, God has ears for our thoughts'. Listening in prayer and service to the Holy Spirit is the key to our success in rebuilding our community, our nation and our world.

Ellen Hawkes

In a time of crisis, everyone pulls together. With all churches closed until further notice, local church members have come together to produce this newsletter. None will be distributed by hand but will be passed on electronically. If you know someone who may be interested in reading it, please send it on. Through Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter Sunday, the hope is that that some COMFORT is available. God bless.