

worship notes

from the United Reformed Church

Sunday 17th May 2026
Ascension
The Revd Dr Sarah Hall

Call to Worship

Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God, greater than all our ideas of you, we praise you.
We know of kings and presidents, we know bosses and bossy people,
but you are greater than any of them.
The universe is your realm,
the human heart is your throne, and we praise you.
Jesus, crucified, risen and ascended, we praise you.
We walked alongside you. We saw you die. We found your empty tomb.
Now we know God has welcomed you home, and we praise you.
Spirit of God, go-between God, we praise you.
You show us God's wisdom. You show us God's will.
You give us hope of God's kingdom here on earth, and we praise you.
God, greater than we can imagine,
Holy dance of new life, of transformation,
Lifting humanity into heaven, we praise you.

We praise you, yet your ascension seems
so far removed from anything we know,
that it's easy to put it, to put you, to one side.
The world we know is one of struggle and hardship,
of error and failure, of sickness and death.
What has your heaven to do with that?
What have you to do with the hopelessness we find in human life?

We are tempted to put you into a box marked 'heaven',
and to take you out on Sundays for an hour.
We are tempted to forget the way you always work:
bringing light out of darkness; joy out of sorrow; life out of death.

Assurance of Pardon

Listen! here *is* good news:

Christ Jesus came into the world to forgive us in our failure,
to accept us as we are, to set us free from evil's power
and make us what we were meant to be.

Through him God says to each of us:

You are accepted. You are forgiven. I will set you free.
And together we respond, through Jesus Christ, our Lord:
Amen. Thanks be to God.

*Adapted from Green, B. (ed.) (1991)
Baptist Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship*

As forgiven people, let us say together the prayer Jesus gave us,
Our Father...

Prayer for Inspiration

Living God, help us so to hear your Word that we may truly understand;
that, understanding, we may believe; and believing, we may follow your way in all
faithfulness, seeking your honour and glory in all that we do. Amen.

Presbyterian Church of the USA

Readings

Acts 1:1-11 | Psalm 47 | Ephesians 1:15-23

All-Age Activity

Waiting for the Spirit

You will need:

A plastic bottle or glass jar,
water,
vegetable oil,
food colouring,
Alka Seltzer tablets

Fill a bottle or jar halfway full with water and mix in some food colouring. Now fill the rest of the bottle with oil, leaving a small space at the top. The oil will separate from the water into a separate layer. Drop an Alka Seltzer tablet (or try a quarter or half at a time if they are large tablets) into the bottle and watch as bubbles of coloured water start to ascend into the oil layer in the style of a mini lava lamp! Watch the bubbles rising and think about what Jesus' ascension might have meant for the disciples. What might they have been thinking or feeling? What does it feel like to wait for something, as the disciples had been told to go and wait for the Holy Spirit to come?

Prayer

Think about situations where you or people you know are waiting for something new to happen. As you drop the tablet into the liquid and see the bubbles ascending, pray that God will take the worries of waiting away and that they will feel God's presence with them as they wait.

from Premier Youth & Children's Work magazine

Sermon Notes

Acts 1:1-11

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles originally formed one 2-volume story. Here, at the beginning of Volume 2, Acts, Luke gives his readers a very brief synopsis of Volume 1, which finished at Luke 24 with a shorter version of Jesus' ascension. Luke's Gospel has an emphasis on the work of God's Holy Spirit, which is taken up at the very beginning of Acts in preparation for the Day of Pentecost, which will be described in Acts 2. That long list of places from which the many witnesses to Pentecost came (dreaded by many a reader of the classic Acts 2 Pentecost passage!), is also foreshadowed in Acts 1:1-11, as Jesus promises his friends they will be his witnesses 'in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'. That pattern of the good news spreading outwards is reflected in the rest of Acts, from the Spirit's explosive action on the streets of Jerusalem to Philip's missionary work in Samaria, Paul's conversion experience in Damascus, and his voyages with Barnabas and Mark through the Mediterranean, into Europe and even as far as Rome - the ends of the earth, so far as Jews were concerned (see also Isaiah 49:6).

Psalm 47

This is one of the enthronement psalms celebrating God's kingship, likely to have been written when David or Solomon was king over Israel. It could be used – and doubtless has been used – to argue for national power and status, both for Israel and for Christian rulers, from Constantine onwards, who saw Christianity as part of their empire-building strategy. Yet the Hebrew prophets constantly tried to remind their rulers that power was to be used in the service of the powerless. And if it is Jesus through whom we most clearly understand God, to whom all the shields of the earth properly belong, then the power of his Ascension is best understood as 'power for' rather than 'power over'; potentially a useful reflection for churches whose worldly power may seem to be diminishing...

Ephesians 1:15-23

Sometimes when reading one of the New Testament letters it's clear what situation in church is under scrutiny; such as the metaphor of striving for the victor's laurel wreath we find in Paul's letter written to Corinth, a city proud of its athletic games. In this passage, though, unlike, say, in 1 and 2 Corinthians, we find no specifics, either names of

the recipients or responses to questions they have asked, but more general encouragement which could apply to any church: even our own, here and now. One scholarly theory to explain this is that the letter was written as a 'round robin' sent to several congregations, with the version we have addressed to the church in Ephesus. While it may feel unsatisfying not to be sure of the letter's origin, its prayer for wisdom and revelation, and its signposting of God's immeasurable power for good, can never go out of date.

Offering

God, who has given us the armour we need,
the power we need to withstand every evil hour,
has given us all things.

For yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power,
the glory, the splendour and the majesty;
everything in heaven and earth is yours.

All things come from you, and of your own do we offer you now:
our successes; our failures;
our time, our money, our attention, our care;
all that you have given us, returned into your hands,
for the work of your kingdom, here in this place
and everywhere in all creation. Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Concern

We give thanks for Christ's ascension;
that though we haven't the words to describe it,
our humanity is part of God's endless life.

Help us to see all people in the light of that staggering truth;
especially those with whom we disagree.

pause

We give thanks for the hope God gives us,
that no power, not even death, can conquer love.
Through wars and rumour of war, through natural disaster,
through lack of work or money or home,
through ills striking body, mind or spirit,
help us to live in the light of that hope.

pause

We give thanks that though ascended, Jesus is with us till time's end.
May we who love him offer that good news to all who still need him as their friend.

pause

All our prayers, spoken and silent, we give to God,
through Christ, in the Holy Spirit's power. Amen.

Blessing

May God lift our hearts to heaven;
may God's kingdom come, God's will be done, right here on earth.
and the blessing of God, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit,
is with us and all people, now and always. Amen.

In Addition to the Compendium of Eastertide Hymns suggested here

<https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/prayer-and-worship/worship-notes/>

Sarah suggests

| | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Christ is alive! | 260 | 416 | 297 | |
| Christ triumphant | | 436 | 319 | 77 |
| Clap your hands you people all | | | | 81 |
| Come dearest Lord | 381 | | | |
| Give me O Christ | 524 | | | |
| Hail thou once despised Jesus | | | 301 | 203 |
| Hallelujah, sing to Jesus | | 445 | 568 | 207 |
| Lord enthroned in heavenly splendour | | | 593 | 431 |

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

Sources

All liturgical material by Sarah Hall

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