**Howick Presbyterian Church Service of Worship**

**Sunday, 24th May 2020 @ Home/Duders Regional Park**

**Ascension Sunday**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Today is Ascension Sunday when we celebrate Christ’s return to God.

***We look up in wonder as he is lifted from us into heaven!***

But this is not a time to gaze upward. There is work to be done.

***Jesus has entrusted the ministry of God’s love to us.***

Let’s get to work!

***Let’s make our hearts ready for the task ahead with prayer and praise!***

Let’s sing Hosanna.

**SONG: Hosanna**

I see the King of glory
Coming on the clouds of fire
The whole earth shakes, the whole earth shakes
I see His love and mercy
Washing over all our sin
The people sing, the people sing

***Hosanna, Hosanna
Hosanna in the highest
Hosanna, Hosanna
Hosanna in the highest***

I see a generation
Rising up to take the place
With selfless faith, with selfless faith
I see a near revival
Staring as we pray and seek
We're on our knees, we're on our knees

Heal my heart and make it clean
Open up my eyes to the things unseen
Show me how to love like You have loved me
Break my heart for what breaks Yours
Everything I am for Your kingdom's cause
As I walk from earth into eternity

**OPENING PRAYER**

For the blessings of each day
we praise your holy name

For strength to endure
in the winter of strife,
shelter from storm,
protection through life.
For the blessings of each day
we praise your holy name

For footsteps to follow
a road that is true,
a love that endures
whatever we do.
For the blessings of each day
we praise your holy name

For faith to believe
hope in our heart,
your Spirit enabling
as we play our part.
For the blessings of each day
we praise your holy name

Thank you for this time of worship.

We pray as you taught us to pray together:

***Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.***

**KIDS TIME AND BIRTHDAYS/ANNIVERSARIES**

Today we celebrate everyone who had a birthday or anniversary this week. We give thanks to God for your life amongst us! You have made this world so much better for so many!

Hello to any boys and girls who are reading, listening to or watching this! How was school?

Ally will go over the story about when Jesus goes into heaven.

**KIDS PRAYER**

You are good and wise

I will praise you when I rise.

Jesus, hear this prayer I send

Bless my family and my friends.

Jesus, help my eyes to see

All the good you send to me.

Jesus, help my ears to hear

Calls for help from far and near.

Jesus, help my feet to go

In the way that You will show.

Jesus, help my hands to do

All things loving, kind, and true.

Jesus, guard me through this day

In all I do and all I say.

Amen.

**What do we say each week? “God loves us and we are special!”**

Let’s sing, Dear Lord and Father of mankind

**HYMN: DEAR LORD AND FATHER OF MANKIND**

1 Dear Lord and Father of mankind,

forgive our foolish ways;

reclothe us in our rightful mind,

in purer lives thy service find,

in deeper reverence, praise.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard

beside the Syrian sea

the gracious calling of the Lord,

let us, like them, without a word

rise up and follow thee.

3 O Sabbath rest by Galilee,

O calm of hills above,

where Jesus knelt to share with thee

the silence of eternity,

interpreted by love!

4 Drop thy still dews of quietness,

till all our strivings cease;

take from our souls the strain and stress,

and let our ordered lives confess

the beauty of thy peace.

5 Breathe through the heats of our desire

thy coolness and thy balm;

let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;

speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,

O still, small voice of calm!

**READING:** *Acts 1:1-11 (NIV)*

*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”*

*Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*

*He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

*After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*

*They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”*

**SERMON – The Ascension**

There are many different images we see of Jesus in the New Testament.

In the Incarnation we Jesus as a vulnerable human.

In his life and ministry we see him as the shepherd, prophet, rabbi, miracle worker.

At the crucifixion, the suffering servant/Lamb that was slain.

At the resurrection, the risen conquering Son.

At the Pentecost, the Spirit of Christ

At the Parousia (The coming again of Jesus) the returning Judge and King

Today is Ascension Sunday, where we remember the way Jesus ascended to heaven at the end of his incarnate earthly ministry. Why is this worth remembering?

This event informs our image of Jesus as Lord, seated at the right hand of the Father, Christ as King, Lamb on the throne, Great High Priest, Ruler of the Kingdom.

It’s interesting, in western protestant Christianity how the empty cross is our most common image for Jesus. In the Catholic Church it is the image of Christ on the Cross.

However, in the Eastern Orthodox church, it is neither of these. Instead it is the Ascended Christ, seated on the throne as Lord, ruling over the cosmos.

Today we read the account from Acts 1. Remember that Acts is volume 2 to Luke. At the end of his first volume, Luke touches on the ascension, and in Acts 1 he picks up on it in more detail.

Since the resurrection, there have been 40 days of visitations between Jesus and his disciples, as well as “convincing proofs” of his resurrection.

Jesus instructs them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift promised from God. He goes over some of the words of the great commission, which speaks of the far reaching nature of their witness and mission.

And then he starts to ascend upwards. This is no vanishing act like other times. This is an actual movement up into the clouds.

As he disappears, two angels appear to them, stating that Jesus is now in heaven, and will return the same way one day.

Some logistical questions come to mind straight away. In this time of history, people believed that the geographical location of heaven was literally above their heads in the clouds. Today we perceive of heaven as in a different realm, outside of time and space, yet not far enough that God is not connected to us.

So did Jesus fly all the way into outer space? Were the clouds a place for him to be teleported to heaven? Or was this just the best way to make clear to people at this time in history where Jesus was going? Did this make the most sense to them based on their understanding of the earth and the heavens?

No tidy answers for this one sorry, but the question I do want to ask is, why is this event so significant? Why is this event recognised in the calendar of the church?

1. It was an intentional statement. If Jesus merely wanted to return to the Father, he could have just vanished. There were other times when he vanished immediately out of sight, as with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. But instead, at the ascension Jesus literally rises up into the clouds and disappears into the distance of the heavens. This was an intentional act.

2. It was a way of formally concluding Jesus’ earthly ministry. He had been appearing and reappearing over the past 40 days. Maybe the disciples thought this would just go on forever. There had to be a way of saying, “this time of Jesus with us in this way has concluded.”

3. It showed that Jesus really had overcome death. He wasn’t just resurrected to die again later as an old man, but to live forever.

4. The ascension marked a new beginning. Soon the Holy Spirit would come, and the movement of the early church would begin.

5. Seeing the ascension happen would have transformed the disciples. Witnessing the ascension changed them. Their vision had been too small. Jesus gives them a bigger vision: Spiritually, Socially , Geographically. They become courageous. They become “way makers.”

6. Most significantly I think, this moment is seen as the Coronation of Jesus as Lord.

Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father, crowned in glory as the King of kings and Lord of Lords. He has been given by God full rights to reign over the church and world as King.

*Phil 2. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,**that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Ephesians 1:20-23

*…he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

The centre of Jesus’ rule shifts from Jerusalem, to the heavenly realms where he takes his place at the right hand of the Father. From such transcendence Jesus reigns, and God’s kingdom expands beyond the limitations of all earthly kings and kingdoms. - Sean White

And so the early church declared that “Jesus is Lord” instead of “Caesar is Lord.”

I wonder what it was like in heaven when Jesus returned. Was there a great celebratory entrance, for the risen conquering Christ, returned to take up his place at the Fathers side, to rule the cosmos?

7. Tim Keller states that “In the ascension Jesus left the limitations of the time-space continuum and passed into the presence of the Father. In his incarnation, Jesus was limited to one spot at one moment. If you wanted to speak with him or relate to him, you had to do it at that place. “But at the ascension,” Keller writes, “Jesus leaves the space-time continuum and passes into the presence of the Father. He is still human, still our second Adam . . . and still our Advocate—yet now he has been so glorified that everything he does has a cosmic scope . . . any time-space limitation passes away.”

8. There is another important function for Jesus’ place in heaven. He is also there as The Great High Priest; the mediator and intercessor between people and God.

**Hebrews 8:1-2**

*Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.*

The disciples had a friend in heaven, advocating and interceding for them, at the right hand of the Father. This is one of the roles attributed to Jesus. He is our Great High Priest – the one who mediates for us. This is why we don’t need human high priests.

9. Finally, the ascension affirms that this is the King who will return.

The Kingdom will come in its fullness. Jesus goes to heaven and will return the same way. Until that time, the disciples are given a mission and a purpose.

So the ascension is significant in so many ways. It’s about endings and new beginnings.

It’s about the return of the victorious Son into heaven.

It’s about his rule over the universe, at the right hand of God.

It’s about the Lordship of Jesus, of his eternal nature. His role as mediator.

We need all of these images of Jesus to understand him.

Which image is most prominent for you? Do the others need balancing out?

Do we get so fixated with the cross, that we forget about Jesus’ Lordship and rule of the cosmos?

You have a friend in heaven, who became a brother to you, flesh and blood, in time and space, and then defeated sin and death, and now rules the cosmos outside of the limitations of time and space. Who loves you so much, has saved you, and who will come again for you.

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

You are free, Lord,

Your Ascension has set you free:

free from the constraints of human existence,

outside the limitations of time and space;

free to be here with us now,

in our worship and fellowship;

and free to be with us always;

for in your freedom

you have bound yourself to us with a promise:

**“Lo! I am with you always**

**even to the very end of time.”**

We pray, Lord, for those

who need to feel you close,

who need the assurance of your love,

the encouragement of your Spirit. [Silence]

We pray for those who are persecuted,

who are discriminated against,

who are mocked because of their faith or race or colour. [Silence]

We pray for those who are imprisoned,

who are tortured,

who are exiled,

because they have fought, struggled and spoken out

for the rights of their people. [Silence]

We pray for those who are destitute,

who are hungry,

who are refugees,

because of the selfishness and apathy of the world. [Silence]

We pray for those who are filled with guilt,

who are broken-hearted,

who are perplexed,

because a relationship has gone wrong. [Silence]

We pray for those who are feeling fed up,

who are in discomfort,

who are afraid,

because they are ill in body, mind or spirit. [Silence]

We pray for those who are numbed,

who are angry,

who are desolate,

because they have been bereaved. [Silence]

We pray for those caught up in war,

and violence,

and hatred;

especially the innocent victims of these evils. [Silence]

We pray at this time of financial turmoil,

for those who have lost jobs,

those who struggle to pay bills,

and those who have the power to affect positive change. [Silence]

Be with us all, Lord:

in all our daily struggles as we seek to follow you.

Be with us all, Lord:

in our periods of doubt and despair;

and in our times of happiness, health and loving.

Be with us all, Lord:

until that time

when in your Kingdom of Love

our joy will know no end: **AMEN**

Thank you for joining together this morning in worship.

Let’s close this time and sing, Be Thou my vision

**CLOSING HYMN: Be Thou my vision**

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the fight;
Be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight;
Thou my soul’s Shelter, Thou my high Tower:
Raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor man’s empty praise,
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

High King of Heaven, my victory won,
May I reach Heaven’s joys, O bright Heaven’s Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

**BLESSING**

*And now may the Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

**Amen.**