



Parramatta  
Mission



uniting  
church  
in Australia,  
Synod of NSW & ACT

# *Easter to Pentecost Reflections 2020*

## *Parramatta Mission*

### *Uniting Church in Australia*

The Season of Easter commences on Easter Day and extends 50 days until Pentecost. On the fortieth day is Ascension. Every Sunday of the year is celebrated as Easter, as the resurrection of Jesus. This year the Pastoral Team will be providing a daily Bible reading, reflection and prayer to assist our members in their daily devotions. In the Acts of the Apostles, 2:41, Luke writes that the Christians “continued steadfastly to the apostle’s teaching and in community, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers.” Faith is a gift of God which is received in obedience. That obedience is expressed in nurturing the gift of faith, in living the Christian life with the whole of our life for the whole of our life. These reflections are our humble contribution to encouraging and nurturing our church in the faith.

**Blessings, The Pastoral Team**

**Reflections will be written by:**

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## Acts 1:1-5 - Monday 18th May 2020

(New Revised Standard Version (NRSV))

### The Promise of the Holy Spirit

1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning<sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.<sup>3</sup> After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup> While staying<sup>[a]</sup> with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me;<sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with<sup>[b]</sup> the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

### Reflection

The author of Luke is also the author of Acts. Both books begin with a reference to Theophilus whose name means 'lover of God'. The connection is now being made between the cross, resurrection, ascension of Jesus with the coming of the Holy Spirit. The events surrounding the dying and rising Christ are bound up with Pentecost. In the book of Acts the narrative says that the apostles were told to remain in Jerusalem. There is no reference of them making a trip back from Galilee to Jerusalem.

They are to 'wait'. It can be difficult to wait and see what will happen. We have become so target oriented, so practical we like to have our goals and put into place how we will achieve things. Imagine being an apostle and being told to 'wait' to see what will happen next. The theme of waiting is very common in the Psalms as well as in the epistles. In the Psalms the experience of waiting is often performed in a time of setback, impending disaster, and when someone is struggling. In the epistles waiting can be like a fruit of the Spirit. Here it shows confidence and trust in God despite, in spite of appearances. Waiting in the book of Acts is here closely tied to a promise which is immersed in the act of baptism. These apostles are waiting for something that will happen 'not many days from now': they do not as yet know what it this baptismal promise will mean for them.

**Prayer:** Spirit of God, teach us to wait.

**Clive Pearson**

**Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35—Tuesday 19th May 2020**

Praise and Thanksgiving

**To the leader. Of David. A Psalm. A Song**

- 1** Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered;  
let those who hate him flee before him.
- 2** As smoke is driven away, so drive them away;  
as wax melts before the fire,  
let the wicked perish before God.
- 3** But let the righteous be joyful;  
let them exult before God;  
let them be jubilant with joy.
- 4** Sing to God, sing praises to his name;  
lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds[a] -  
his name is the Lord -  
be exultant before him.
- 5** Father of orphans and protector of widows  
is God in his holy habitation.
- 6** God gives the desolate a home to live in;  
he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,  
but the rebellious live in a parched land.
- 7** O God, when you went out before your people,  
when you marched through the wilderness, *Selah*
- 8** the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain  
at the presence of God, the God of Sinai,  
at the presence of God, the God of Israel.
- 9** Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad;  
you restored your heritage when it languished;
- 10** your flock found a dwelling in it;  
in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.
- 32** Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth;  
sing praises to the Lord, *Selah*
- 33** O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens;  
listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.
- 34** Ascribe power to God,  
whose majesty is over Israel;  
and whose power is in the skies.
- 35** Awesome is God in his[a] sanctuary,  
the God of Israel;  
he gives power and strength to his people.

Blessed be God!

## Reflection

“To the winner go the spoils.”

“History is written by the victors.”

“There can only be one winner.”

We have many sayings around winning, and in many respects, the society and time we live in characterised by competition.

This psalm is in many ways a celebration of winning! But victory can be understood from more than one perspective. It can seem a very simple concept. Winner and loser. Enemy and friend. Black and white.

It could seem that there are only two possibilities. and yet....is life always so straightforward? Is there another perspective hidden within the words of this psalm?

Who are God's enemies? could I also be counted amongst their number?

When I am enjoying times of favour and blessing....who do I give credit? God or myself?

How is winning measured? Material wealth? Feeling good? Freedom of choice?

What is God's standard?

The orphan, the widow, the desolate and homeless, the prisoner, the rebel...are they shown care and welcomed into fellowship? What is the connection between winning and justice?

All the praises and shouts of victory in this psalm are for the God who provides for all, who rescues all, and who alone is worthy. Whose glory is present in each day and in every life. For the God whose standards are so very different to what we might choose for ourselves.

**Prayer:** *Loving God, Thank you for your loving kindness for each person which is according to your eternal nature...so far above and beyond our ways. Help us to understand your heart for creation, for each person, for me...and help us to give you all the glory, for you alone are worthy. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.*

**Sarah Bishop**

## **1 Peter 4:12-14 & 5:6-11 - Wednesday 20th May 2020**

### **Suffering as a Christian**

<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. <sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. <sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup> Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. <sup>10</sup> And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup> To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

### **Reflection**

In writing the series of reflections on 1 Peter I have mentioned in the past that this letter was addressed to several churches scattered throughout the Roman empire who were suffering persecution for their faith in Christ. This is pretty evident by the fact that 1 Peter has twelve uses of the verb "suffer" out of only 42 in the whole New Testament.

In the above two passages Peter continues to encourage the Christians. He does not avoid or play down the persecution but addresses it squarely by acknowledging their suffering as real, and he builds their confidence by encouraging them to view their suffering through the lens of a crucial reminder: Christ also suffered. So Peter says that suffering should not come as a shock to those who bear the name of Christ. "Don't be surprised", he writes "at the fiery ordeal that belongs to this present earthly life, as though something strange were happening to you" (4:12).

Peter also sees suffering as an occasion for rejoicing, for in suffering we share in the sufferings of Christ (4:13). Indeed, Peter sees suffering as the mark of the believers identity with Christ. But this suffering is not random. Neither is it masochistic. It must have a purpose as Christ suffered "for us" to redeem us and to show us God's grace and mercy, to show us just how much God loves us and how far God will go to communicate that love to us.

This suffering would have different bearing to Christians in different places of the world, like for the Christians in Afghanistan or Egypt their suffering is very similar to the one Peter mentions, but not ours. At this very moment the common denominator of suffering is COVID 19. Besides we all have our own sufferings – big and small, physical and mental, emotional and spiritual. We suffer as an individual and as a community.

Although suffering is real, Peter is confident that it does not come from God, and he encourages the followers of Christ to accept the suffering with humility and draw closer to God, and not be driven away, and continue to do the works that Christ began. The humble know that at the right time, perhaps even in the life to come, God will exalt them. We are an Easter people who are sustained and encouraged by the hope that, whatever comes, God has joined us to the suffering and victory of Christ, whom God has raised from the dead.

At a personal level, I find great comfort and strength from the words of 1 Peter, that in the midst of hardship, trial, challenge, pain, hurt and brokenness, Christ still loves me and his church and constantly loves us back to life. John the Evangelist has convinced me that Jesus was glorified in his own suffering and death. I do not dare say that my own suffering is necessary or efficacious in the same way that Jesus' suffering was. But I am confident that in the crucible of the fiery ordeal, the God of all grace will restore, support, strengthen and establish God's people. Amen.

**Manas Ghosh**

## Acts 1:6-14 –Thursday 21st May 2020

(New Revised Standard Version (NRSV))

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” <sup>9</sup> When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup> They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

<sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. <sup>13</sup> 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 <sup>[a]</sup> James. <sup>14</sup> All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

### Reflection

Once upon a time today would have been a holiday: well, not in Australia, Fiji or India or .... It would have been in most countries in Europe in the distant past and in some still today. It would have been a holiday: stay at home! Celebrate the day. It is Ascension Day. It is a strange story to modern ears – though no more strange than some of the other stories surrounding Jesus of Nazareth. The risen Christ rises heavenwards via a cloud providing the mode of transport. It is a scene that has often been painted—in the past, but no often now.

The Ascension is actually rather important for us. The resurrection means that Jesus was raised from the dead but was still bound to first century Palestine. He is confined in time and place. The Ascension ‘lifts’ Christ up into the presence of God in a way which makes him available through the Spirit to every time and every place—hence you and me.

Our Christian faith depends upon this strange event - but it is seldom celebrated these days like Christmas, Easter or Pentecost. Why not, while confined to home this year, celebrate the Ascension and give thanks to God for your life in the risen and ascended Christ ..... and maybe, in place of a prayer, meditate on these lyrics:

Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.  
His cross stands empty to the sky.  
Let streets and homes with praises ring.  
His love in death shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound  
to distant years in Palestine,  
he comes to claim the here and now,  
and conquer every place and time.

Not throned above, remotely high,  
untouched, unmoved by human pains  
but daily, in the midst of life,  
our Saviour, with the Father reigns.

In every insult, rift and war,  
where color, scorn or wealth divide,  
he suffers still, yet loves the more,  
and lives, though ever crucified.

Christ is alive! His Spirit burns  
through this and every future age,  
till all creation lives and learns  
his joy, his justice, love and praise.

**Clive Pearson**

## **Ephesians 1:15-23 Friday 22nd May 2020**

(New Revised Standard Version (NRSV))

<sup>15</sup>I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love<sup>[a]</sup> toward all the saints, and for this reason <sup>16</sup>I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup>I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, <sup>18</sup>so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. <sup>20</sup>God<sup>[b]</sup> put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. <sup>22</sup>And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

### **Reflection**

These verses are sometimes read on the last Sunday of the Christian year in November, when the church celebrates "Christ the King". Paul's tone is one of praise and gratitude for the community of faith in Ephesus, and also one of immense wonder and hope in God's power. Not only is this seen in what God has done in Christ and his resurrection, but what God continues to do through the church, Christ's body here on earth. This is about God's kingdom which is both here and now and not yet. Paul wants the people to know the "hope to which he has called you". These words about God's power which is greater than anything had particular relevance to these people who lived under the authority of the Roman Empire. They point us, in these times of ours, towards the riches that faith in God brings to the followers of Christ in any age.

**Prayer:** *Sometimes, O God, we forget to notice the wonder of your never-ending work among us and the unstoppable power of your grace. Thank you, that inspite of our flaws, you continue to make of us your body, in our time and place, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Mary Pearson**

## **Luke 24:44-53 - Saturday 23rd May 2020**

44 Then Jesus said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you while I was with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the Psalms must be fulfilled. 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. 46 And he said to them, “Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And see, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with vitality from on high.” 50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. 51 While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53 and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

(Translation by Keith Hamilton)

### **Reflections**

The creeds of the church, the Nicene Creed and Apostles Creed, both affirm the ascension of Jesus: “he ascended into heaven.” Of course, behind these creeds, both Luke and Matthew speak of the ascension. Luke portrays Jesus giving final instructions, blessing the disciples and then ascending into the heavens. This is more than just tying up the loose threads to end the gospels. And earthly language fails us when we speak about other-worldly happenings. The ascension marks the end of the earthly life of Jesus, the completion of Easter, and heralds the beginning of the church on the Day of Pentecost fifty days after Easter, ten after Ascension. Theologically there are some very important points here. Ascension points to who Jesus is and his relationship with God as one of intimate closeness, and of God glorifying Jesus. In Jesus ascending into heaven – wherever that is – means there is no separation between believers and God. The ascension means that the lives of believers are forever located in Christ, who has lived, experienced the limits of humanity, broken down death, and returned to God the creator. Jesus is not limited to one location of time and place. Most intensively he is present in the breaking of the bread and the taking of wine in the community of faith.

In this time of COVID-19, we have been gathering for our church services and communion services on zoom. As we have broken the bread and drunk from the cup, in our own houses, separate yet united, surely the risen and ascended Christ has been present. That is nourishment for the Christian life. But as good as that is, we are not left there. With food and drink for the journey, and the Spirit to guide us, the risen Christ sends us in mission and ministry to the world around us. No doubt different to the time of the early disciples, and no doubt no less important.

**Keith Hamilton**

*Prayer: God of majesty, in you is our life and hope, our future: grant us such awareness of your gracious presence throughout the whole creation and in the breaking of the bread, continue to inspire us by your Spirit, and send us to all the places of our lives as heralds of repentance and witnesses of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God in glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

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### **John 17: 1-11 - 24th May 2020**

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup>I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup>So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

<sup>6</sup>"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup>Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; <sup>8</sup>for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup>I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

<sup>11</sup>And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

## Reflection

This passage can be a bit difficult to understand if read quickly. It is a prayer as John captures something of the final parts of Jesus' life prior to his death. In some ways it is as though Jesus is 'reporting' to God of the things Jesus was asked to do. If we think about it, while many may see Jesus' crucifixion as a failure, this passage reminds us that Jesus' life was something much more. Here he is asking to return to the place of glory he rightly has with the 'Father' before the world existed (v5).

Yet it also speaks of the relationship between Jesus and the people he has been 'given'. It opens up the relationship we have because of Jesus and all he has done. Part of that relationship is to be one - not the same - but to work together as one.

In the current Covid 19 pandemic it is reassuring to hear the words where Jesus prays for protection (v11). It is also encouraging to hear that we are able, when we seek to follow in the way of Jesus, that we are able to glorify him (v10).

In this strangest of times it may be really difficult to hang in there, especially when we have some challenging times yet to come. Yet we are called to be Christians and witness to God revealed to us in Jesus Christ in all of our lives, not just when we are gathered together.

Our world has changed and we will change with it but in all of the changes and challenges we can hold onto the encouraging words of Jesus as we seek to be one. Perhaps in the midst of the challenges and changes we can be one as we live out our faith. Even though we are separate may we still have a strong sense of being one - in and through Christ.

**Christine Bayliss Kelly**