



St. Andrew's United Church of Christ

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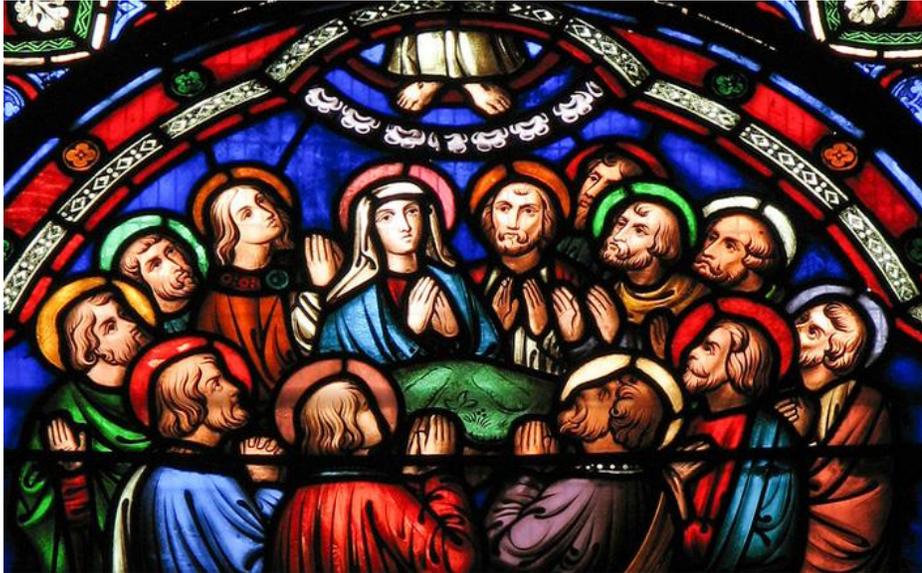
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SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

ASCENSION SUNDAY

May 24, 2020

10:00 A.M.



Dear Friends in Christ,

Today marks the Seventh and final Sunday of the Easter Season. During these seven Sundays, it's been my practice to begin the Call to Worship with the Easter greeting, "Christ is risen, He is risen, indeed;" and the Salutation from Revelation 1:4. Next Sunday is Pentecost Sunday and will make room for some changes in the liturgy.

Ascension Day occurred this past Thursday, so today's worship combines an Ascension Day theme with Easter hope. I also realize that the secular calendar is celebrating Memorial Day, so the Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession remembers those men and women who have served our country in the armed forces.

While Michigan is gradually beginning to reopen, no definite guidelines have been offered for area churches yet, so we are still in a wait and see mode. Consistory will be meeting soon to discuss some steps for us to take when the green light is given, but all of this is still uncertain.

Until then, Thank You for your continued prayerful and financial support of the work and ministry of St. Andrew's. As the hymn goes, "God be with you until we meet again!"

Peace and Prayers

In Christ,

Pastor Bigelow

Silent Prayer for the Beginning of Worship — Almighty God, as we prepare to worship today, we ask that you stretch our imaginations to sense the majesty and mystery of your ascension. In this time of worship, give us what we cannot give ourselves; faith to trust that as Jesus promised, while praying for us in heaven, he abides with us on earth until the end of time. We pray this through the same Jesus who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

WE GATHER TO WORSHIP THE TRIUNE GOD

CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ is risen!

He is risen, indeed!

May our lives profess and proclaim that “our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.”

Amen!

God has ascended amid shouts of joy.

The Lord amid sounding trumpets.

Sing praises to God, sing praises;

sing praises to our King, sing praises.

For God is King of all the earth;

sing to him a psalm of praise.

God reigns over the nations;

God is seated on his holy throne.

(Psalm 47:5-8)

SALUTATION

“Grace to you and peace from the One who is and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

Amen!

(Revelation 1:4-5)

GATHERING HYMN [*Rejoice, the Lord is King*](#)

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal God, we live in a frightening and perplexing world that seems to be unraveling and spinning out of control. As we offer our worship this morning, remind us once again, that Jesus has ascended into heaven, enthroned at your right hand, where he rules in glory.

As he reigns as King in our hearts, may we rejoice in his peace, glory in his justice, and live in his love. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen

WE ARE RENEWED BY THE SPIRIT

CALL TO CONFESSION

God's words assure us that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. In humility and faith, let us confess our sin to God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty God, you have raised Jesus from death to life and crowned him Lord of all. We confess that we have not bowed before him or acknowledged his rule in our lives. We have gone along with the ways of the world and failed to give him the glory.

(silent reflection)

Forgive us, and raise us from sin, that we may be your faithful people, obeying the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ, who rules the world and is head of the church, his body. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE AND FORGIVENESS

Hear the good news of the gospel; if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sin, and not for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. In Christ we are forgiven! Thanks be to God.

(based on I John 2:1-2)

GOD'S DIRECTION FOR OUR LIVES

Please read Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17

WE HEAR AND LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURE LESSON

Old Testament—Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

New Testament — Acts 1:6-14

Text – Acts 1:8

“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 of the earth.”

SERMON – *Witnesses to the Ends of the Earth!* (found on pages 7-8)

HYMN OF RESPONSE [*We've A Story to Tell to the Nations*](#)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH – THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth;
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father almighty,
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

WE GO FORTH TO REVEAL JESUS CHRIST IN THE WORLD

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

God of grace and goodness, we give thanks for our experience of the world that you have created and the beauty of this Spring season. We offer thanks for the rain and softening of the earth; the sights of tulips and daffodils; tree blossoms and greening of fields. We give thanks for deep and lasting relationships with those whom we love; for friends of many years and for new friends, casual encounters and for delightful people who might yet become friends.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we offer our gratitude for men and women who have served our country in the armed forces. We are reminded of those who have sacrificed themselves and now live with the pain and disability and PTSD. Be a source of strength and courage for them and for those who no longer find a reason to go on. Be near to them and their families. We give thanks for all those who gave the ultimate gift of their lives so that we might live today. Teach us the folly of war and bring to us an understanding so that love and reconciliation may prevail in the world.

We pray too for those who are having a difficult time in this pandemic – for those who feel stuck in their homes and long for routines that were suddenly swept away. We pray for those who are isolated from loved ones and their families. Uphold the St. Andrew's congregation and give wisdom to make whatever necessary adjustments that might be needed to sustain the ministry. In all of this, may each of us find your love and assurance and be led to find beneath the pain, a peace that passes all understanding.

Give us strength, courage, wisdom and perspective as we strive to live the days of this next week for your honor and glory. We pray this in Jesus' name, who taught us to pray:

***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 debts,
as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.***

PARTING HYMN [*Our God Reigns*](#)

BENEDICTION

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you on this day, now and forever. AMEN.

SERMON – *Witnesses to the Ends of the Earth!*

SCRIPTURE

Old Testament—Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35

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Text – Acts 1:8

“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 of the earth.”

Today’s scripture on this seventh Sunday of Easter is from the Acts of the Apostles. Easter continues. Jesus was raised from the dead and now he convened his scattered, fearful, disillusioned disciples. Jesus had earlier commanded his disciples, to “love one another,” and to “go, make disciples!” Now in Acts, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem (that is close to home), Judea (that is the whole countryside) and Samaria (that is way out there, the very ends of the earth). You will be my witnesses, says the Risen Christ.”

Who’s a witness? A witness is someone who has observed an event. For example, if a person is called to court, they are called to testify, to tell the court what they saw. A witness witnesses something and then tells the court what they saw. There is an Eye Witness News program as well, which uses the same principal which gives witness to the facts of what has been seen and heard. And here, the risen Christ, after Easter, calls us to be witnesses.

Jesus Christ is not some figment of our imagination. He is not a feeling. He is a distinct personality who makes some distinctive, irreducible claims, who makes specific promises, like the promises he makes in Acts today. Jesus is the God who came to us, who came back to us, a God different from our ideas of God, so different from our ideas of God, we couldn’t have thought him up ourselves. You don’t have to be a perfect person, a great speaker, you just have to be a witness, just testify to what you have seen and heard. This is how Christians are made, one ordinary person telling another what has happened. And Christ calls you to witness. Your testimonial of what you have seen and heard is powerful.

One of the many lessons that the Sheltering in Place order has taught us about our Christian faith, is that the church is the people, the body of Christ, whether we are in the building or not. While the building has been closed these last 10 weeks, the body of Christ is open!

While corporate worship concludes on Sunday with the Benediction, faith does not end there when we walk out of the sanctuary but begins as the body of Christ breaks and goes into the world to reveal and witness to Jesus Christ whether we are in our homes, work, school, or wherever we are.

We are called to be witnesses to the risen Christ. Evangelism has been defined as being dedicated to the task of helping people believe in Jesus Christ. As we witness, we help other believe in Jesus Christ. People are looking at us; listening to us, at our witness. One has to ask, “what does our witness say about us, about our faith?” It is essential that as the burden of proof rests on us, we give a solid witness that our lives and message are believable. There must be consistency between the way we believe and the way we behave. One of the problems in our attempt to be witnesses and share the love of Christ, is that people do not find us believable because our lives stand in contradiction to what we say we believe. To be a witness to Jesus Christ is to link what we say with our lips to how we live our lives.

Let me conclude with what an unknown author put strongly in, *The Gospel According to You*.

“There’s a sweet old story translated for people today, but written in the long, long, ago –

The Gospel according to Mark, Luke and John, of Christ and His mission below.

You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day, by deeds that you do, by words that you say,
people read what you write, whether faithless or true.

Say, what is the gospel according to you?

People read and admire the Gospel of Christ, with its love so unfailing and true;
but what do they say, and what do they think of the gospel according to you?

Tis a wonderful story, that gospel of love, as it shines in the Christ-life divine, and O,
that its truth might be told again in the story of your life and mine!

Unselfish mirrors in every scene, love blossoms on every sod, and back from its vision the
heart comes to tell the wonderful goodness of God.

You are writing each day a letter to people, take care that the writing is true.

Tis the only gospel some people will read, that gospel according to you.”

AMEN.