

## Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> May- 2020

Welcome & Announcements

Call to worship from Psalm 68

Hymn *'In Christ alone'* praise group

Prayer

Reading 1 Peter 5:6-11

Children's thought

Video

Reading 2 Acts 1:6-14

Sermon

Prayers

Hymn MP835 Great is the Darkness (13/5/18)

Blessing

**Welcome-** Good morning & welcome to our Sunday service of worship for Regent Street Methodist in Newtownards. Wherever and whenever you are watching this it's simply great to have you with us as we come to praise God today.

As usual, just a few announcements before we begin. Firstly, a reminder that next Sunday's service is a special one, it's our annual ARK service & it will be led mostly by our young people & children.

A little further ahead then, our next 'live' communion service through our Facebook page will be the Sunday following that the 7<sup>th</sup> of June at 12 noon & even further on we hope to do a Zoom church picnic on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June & you will hear more about that in the weeks ahead.

I also want to remind you that we are producing a weekly prayer sheet coming out each Tuesday on the website. However this coming week I also hope to try and move our Tuesday prayer time online through Zoom. So if you would normally come on Tuesday for prayer or if you would just like to try it out then give me an email & I will send you a link to click so that hopefully we can meet live on Tuesday for prayer. Sadly I know that this might not work for everyone & if that's the case for you then perhaps you can sit down at 1pm with the prayer sheet & pray along with us in spirit.

Finally regarding prayer, I wanted to give a final opportunity to any who might consider looking at the prayer course online & then being part of a small group to discuss it through Zoom. Again if you're interested then you need to let me know by Wednesday of this week, that's the 27<sup>th</sup> May.

Thanks for your patience with the announcements & do keep passing on any notices to me... So let's us now still our hearts & use some words from Psalm 68 as we prepare to worship God.

**Call to worship** Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth.

***Sing praises to the Lord.***

Sing to the one who rides across the ancient heavens,

***his mighty voice thundering from the sky.***

Tell everyone about God's power. His majesty shines down on Israel; ***his strength is mighty in the heavens.***

God is awesome in his sanctuary. The God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. ***Praise be to God!***

Now the praise group is going to lead us in our opening hymn, In Christ alone.

**Prayer** – Lord God, as we come to worship you now; so we say that in Christ alone our hope is found, He is our light, our strength our song. For He alone has conquered death, he alone rose to new life & he alone ascended to sit at your right hand in glory. Lord God this day we worship Jesus the one who ascended in triumph to reign with You in splendour yet also as the one who did not leave us as orphans. God of incomparable majesty as we worship You today we declare that You are the Lord who will always be on the throne.... & yet as we gaze upwards at your majesty, so we pause & confess that at times we have forgotten that You sit on the throne. At times our worries, fear & selfish desires have led us into doubt & disobedience. So we ask again for forgiveness & grace through Christ.

In the words of Psalm 103 *Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. <sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul, & forget not all his benefits—<sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins & heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit & crowns you with love and compassion....*

In Christ our sins are forgiven.

We are now going to hear our first reading.

**1 Peter 5:6-11** *So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honour. <sup>7</sup> Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. <sup>8</sup> Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Stand firm against him, & be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.*

*<sup>10</sup> In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. <sup>11</sup> All power to him forever! Amen.*

### **Children's' Thought**

I wonder if you missed it? Well Thursday passed was a very special day. Yes Thursday past was SAMTSIRHC day...Yes! Wait... What do you mean that you have never heard of SAMTSIRHC day... Well maybe this will help... let me put it another way. (write out Samtsirc backwards) CHRISTMAS Yes last Thursday was Christmas backwards day. You see at Christmas ...Jesus Christ came down... But last Thursday we remember that Jesus didn't just come down to earth but that 40 days after He rose from the grave ...Jesus left to go up to His Father in heaven... it's called Ascension day.

Yes last Thursday we remembered the most important lift of there has ever been... as Jesus physically left us, & we are

going to think more about that today. But before we do that let's remember that before Jesus left he told His disciples to

*Go (point forward with one arm and finger outstretched)*

*Into all the world (describe a tiny circle with your outstretched finger and then make that circle bigger and bigger)*

*And share the good news (cup hands together and offer 'the contents' around to people left and right)*

*With everybody, everywhere (rapidly point to everyone in the whole group and beyond)*

**And I will be with you.** (bring arms together on chest)

**Just wait, stop in Jerusalem until you receive the promise.** (open hands again)

Yes let's remember that Jesus left us work to do...

## **Video- Ascension**

**Second Reading Acts 1:6-14** *Then they gathered around him & asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; & you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, & in all Judea and Samaria, & to the ends of the earth."*

*<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, & a cloud hid him from their sight. <sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> "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."*

*<sup>12</sup> Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. <sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James & Andrew; Philip & Thomas, Bartholomew & Matthew; James son of Alphaeus & Simon the Zealot, & Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women & Mary the mother of Jesus, & with his brothers.*

## **24/5/20 SERMON**

It's one of those words we say so often & normally we use it without thinking but sometimes ,in certain situations it can be so difficult to say... I wonder if that's why we use different words instead, words which are the same but sound nicer, warmer, less final? Words like Bye-bye, see ya, toodle-oo, .adieu... bye.. Yes saying goodbye, can at times be such a difficult thing...

As we heard earlier, this Thursday we arrived in the Church calendar at **ascension day**, a day when we remember the Jesus leaving this earth & ascending up to His Father in heaven. Now if saying good bye can be hard at times..then surely it must have been difficult for those disciples all those years ago. Here was their teacher, friend & saviour, the one who gave them hope, but now He was leaving. I can imagine that some of them just wanted Jesus to stay.

And maybe there is also a part of us that wished Jesus had stayed on earth too. I mean aren't there times when we would just like to see Jesus in the flesh... times when we

thought wouldn't everything be much simpler if we could just see God...Yes perhaps today we don't feel like ascension is something to celebrate... Yet it is...

About 2 weeks ago we had another special date, for on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May many around our world remembered the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the END of World war 11... VE day marked the end of the war in Europe & there was celebration. But when you think about it there must have also been many difficult goodbyes as comrades & friends parted & left for their own homes. It was a time of farewells yet it came about because a victory had been won.

So the first reason why Ascension is important is because it points to VICTORY....It tells us that Jesus finished the work that God the Father had given Him....As the bible tells us in Hebrews 10:12 *'when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,'* Yes Jesus left because it was time to sit down beside the Father... for His work on earth was successfully completed. Jesus had conquered sin & death...

Now we know that life here on earth can feel far from victorious at times. Sin, sickness & Satan are strong foes & at times we might feel as if they are winning. But they're not, they are defeated as Paul says in Rom 8:1-2 *So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. & because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.*

Yes in the midst of this present crisis as our church building remains shut it might feel as if things are slipping away, but remember today that Jesus has overcome the world Jhn16:33 This virus, or the unseen troubles that you face today, were not unseen by Him & while these days are painful they will not be the final word, for the final word in Jesus' is victory.

So how is your Zoom, Skype or What's App skills? I know for some of you those things still remain a mystery! But for others, you like me, have learnt to use these scary tools in the past days & so been able to keep in touch with family or friends. Personally I wasn't much interested in technology until this crisis started but I have in these past weeks realised just how useful it can be for connecting us.

As Jesus' ascension speaks of victory so too, as strange as it might sound, it increases our connection with God. Even before His crucifixion Jesus had promised His disciples that after He left, God would *give them another Helper, to be with you forever.* (john 14:16) So Jesus told them that the Holy Spirit would come to dwell in their lives & lead them & empower them. But this was to happen only after Jesus himself left. So Jesus' ascension paved the way for the Spirit to come, not just to the 12 disciples... but to all who would trust Him. So Jesus' departure opened up the way for the Spirit **come ...and make home with us..**

So the ascension is not about God withdrawing from us rather it's actually the opposite, The ascension opens the way for God to come close to all who desire Him & our willing to trust Him. Do we want that this morning, do we desire to know God deeper... if so He has made the way...

I don't know if you have seen some of the funny video's that have been circulating about how we might behave when this lockdown is all over? Certainly it will be a day to remember, a day when we are able to cherish again many of those things that we used to take for granted... Going out to a coffee shop...shopping & greeting people with a handshake or a hug. Yes, haven't we rediscovered that it's meeting up with others that we miss the most?

But this reminds us of another day...a day that ascension points to.. a day all about meeting up.. For as the disciples stood gazing into the sky after Jesus had left...suddenly they were faced with 2 angels who told them...'*Men of Galilee.. 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.*' Yes one day Jesus will return as king & judge, so the truth is...it was never goodbye... it was always 'we'll meet again' I pray that we will all be ready for that meeting.

**Lets pray...** You are free, Lord, your Ascension has set you free: free from the constraints of human existence, outside the limitations of time & space; free to be here with us now, in our worship & fellowship; & 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."**

So Lord we pray, for those who need to feel you close this day... We pray for those who burdened by illness... We continue to for baby Rosie who is very ill in intensive care & for Hannah Smyth also extremely ill We pray also for Christine, Cyril, Ellen Stewart,

Nicole's mum, Pat, John, Sammy , Elsbeth & Tina Donaldson in hospital.

We pray too for Colette who is in ICU with Covid-19 & we continue praying for 2 young boys with cancer - Timothy Harte & Daniel Kidson.

We pray too for those who feel the weight of loss in these days... For the families of Betty Millar, Greta Cooper & Stephen Tew...& for Anne, Ian, Marie, Gary, Ann, Rikki, Claire, Samantha & Morris, Hilda, Marta & David & the Smyth family. Lord let them know that you are truly close.

We pray too for all those across our globe who are struggling with financial uncertainty & fears about their future... Lord let them experience the peace of Christ.

Lord 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; & in our times of happiness, health & loving. Be with us Lord whatever situations we face today.. Help us know that we are not alone. Be with us all, Lord: until that time when in your Kingdom of Love our joy will know no end: And let us say together the Lord's prayer. **AMEN**

So let us join in singing our closing hymn. Great is the darkness...

**Closing blessing-** Almighty God, your blessed Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things. Mercifully give us faith to trust that, as he promised, he abides with us on earth to the end of time; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

And we say the words of the GRACE together. Amen.