

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 12 May 2024 - Sunday After Ascension

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Ezekiel 36.24-28; Acts 1.15-17 and 21-26 (this must be either first or second reading); Psalm 1; 1 John 5.9-13; John 17.6-19

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Steven Rothwell, Curate Training Officer and Training Incumbent

Does your church have a mission statement? Here are some examples from churches in different parts of the world:

Example 1: *(We are) A fellowship of believers demonstrating the love of God to all people; leading them to a personal relationship to Jesus Christ - accepting and assisting them in worship, Bible study and Christian service.*

Example 2: *The purpose of our church is summarized in a single sentence based on two key scriptures:*

We exist to reach up - Worship;

To reach out - Evangelism;

And to reach in - Discipleship.

Example 3: *The mission of (our) Church is to proclaim the Gospel to the world in worship, witness, and work, that all may know Jesus Christ personally. Inspired and guided by the love of God the Father, through the Lordship of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves, our time, and our possessions.*

Example 4:

Know Christ and Make Christ Known. Come & See. Come & Grow.

Come & Share. Go & Serve!

Does your church have something like any of these? What would you write if you were asked to compose a mission statement? For the church, Ascension is the time when the disciples received their mission statement - to spread the Good News, but before they could begin to act out that mission statement their first job was to **learn to live without Jesus in their company.**

In Acts, we read of the coming of the Holy Spirit. The age of the spirit is about to dawn. God's spirit is to be evident in fresh ways. The interest in the early part of the Acts is less in what actually happened to Jesus than *what is about to happen* in the lives of the earliest Christians - those over whom the Holy Spirit would sweep across. As Jesus leaves, the Spirit-infused mission of the church begins in earnest.

2,000 years on from that time, the mission of the church continues. If Jesus were to return today, here and now, perhaps in the guise of some sort of ecclesiastical auditor, what could we offer him in terms of a millennial report? Would we be happy to meet him, to show him what we have done with the church, would we be full of energy and enthusiasm? “*Come and see what we've done; you're going to love it!*”

Or would our response to his visit be more muted. Perhaps we could delay things a little: “*maybe you'd like a cup of tea before we show you around*” ...or perhaps we would be bothered at the idea of having to answer to Jesus at all: “*Oh no, it's **Him** again.*”

The church always seems to be defining its purpose, restating its mission. Coming up with new ways of saying the same thing. There are so many churches, denominations, who approach mission and evangelism and the teaching of faith in so many different ways. Just how many ways can there be to talking about mission?

There is one thing that guides mission, one thing that is common to all churches - the Holy Spirit. All churches are constantly trying to find it, to seek it and to know it when it's there. It is not a tangible thing; it's not like having an actual person to show you the way. The Holy Spirit moves with a disconcerting unpredictability. Just when we think we know, the Holy Spirit blows our knowledge out of the window. The period between Ascension and Pentecost is a time when we look towards the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus knew that the time would come for him to return to God. If he didn't, the disciples wouldn't continue to grow as they needed to. You can't be a missionary from the comfort of what you know. Jesus had to abandon his friends in real terms, even if he promised to be with them in their hearts and minds. The disciples' mission was to go out and preach the Good News to people everywhere.

But they had a mission to undertake before that journey even began: their first mission was to learn to live without Jesus. They had to leave behind their mentor, they had to step up and take responsibility. They had been led by Jesus. Now they were to become the new leaders, the teachers, the mentors. They had been led like children. The disciples' first mission was to grow up.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how Matthias felt or I wonder how Joseph (Justus) felt when Matthias was chosen?

- I wonder how you feel about how choices are made?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder why they said 'Lord you know everyone's heart'? What do you think that might mean?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

As we celebrate together, let us pray together.

*Response: Both heaven and earth: **are full of God's glory.***

God of love, we pray for unity in the Church and reconciliation and renewed vision.
Both heaven and earth: **are full of God's glory.**

As we recall the shouts of praise in heaven as Christ appears, we pray for all who help our neighbourhoods to flourish; those who support, care, and help others.

Both heaven and earth: **are full of God's glory**

We pray for all farewells and homecomings among our families and friends and for all who have lost touch with loved ones and long for reunion.

Both heaven and earth: **are full of God's glory**

Loving God, we pray for those who are full of tears, and cannot imagine being happy again; we pray for those whose hearts have hardened, whose inner hurts have never yet been healed. We pray for wholeness and comfort and new life.

Both heaven and earth: **are full of God's glory**

We commend to your eternal love those we remember who have died, and we pray for those who miss their physical presence.

Both heaven and earth: **are full of God's glory**

We praise and bless you, God of our making, for the way you draw us deeper into the meaning of life. Merciful God, **accept these prayers for the sake of you Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

Suggested hymns/songs

Let the earth rejoice and sing

Alleluia, sing to Jesus

At the name of Jesus

The head that once was crowned with thorns

Crown him with many crowns

All hail the power of Jesus name

Shine Jesus Shine

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- reflectionary.org – lectionary-based resources
- engageworship – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)