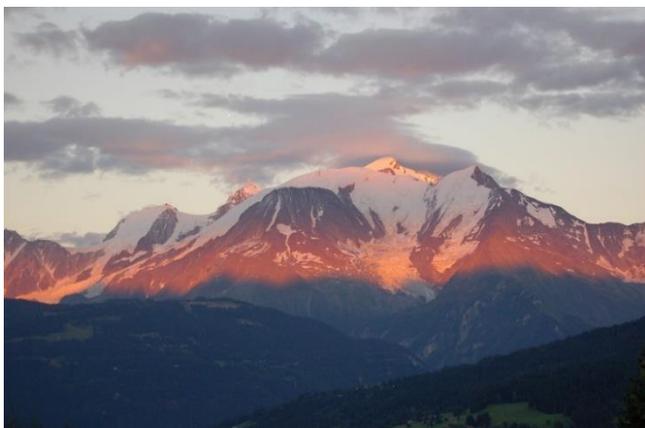


Living in Christ: The hope to which we are called

A service outline for 31st May 2020 "Pentecost Sunday"

We continue on our six-week series following themes from the Circuit Lectionary series, under the overall heading of 'Living in Christ'. This is our sixth and last in the series.



Preparing for Worship: This is a photograph of sunset on the Alps that we took a few years ago. It lifts my heart and helps me to be aware of the power and glory of God.

Would you like to take or search out a photograph of something that speaks to you of God's glory?

Think of a time when you saw that the world can be awesome and give thanks to God.

Introduction: Today we reach the end of our series "Living in Christ". In our Bible passage we will read of St. Paul's great vision of Jesus Christ exulted and ruling over everything. You might like to listen to the song "Come let us sing to the One". The words are below. You might like to sing along, or simply use the words for reflection. This song focuses on the awesome nature of Jesus and appropriately for Pentecost it also speaks of "The Spirit of Life":

Song: *Singing the Faith 2* "Come let us sing to the One, to the Father of life whose lights fills the earth like the sun". You can find a music version of this here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zK7r6mA-EmE>

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Come, let us sing to the One,
to the Father of life,
whose light fills the earth like the sun ;
come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Great is the world he has made,
are the myst'ries untold,
is his measureless power of old ;
come, come let us sing to our God.

*To our God, who is able
to strengthen us in his grace
beyond all we imagine,
be all glory and praise,
be all praise.*

2 Come, let us sing to the One,
to the Saviour of life,
find the fullness of God in the Son ;

come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Wild is the mercy of Christ,
is the richness of grace,
is the unending life we embrace ;
come, come let us sing to our God.

3 Come, let us sing to the One,
to the Spirit of life,
leading us in the way of the Son ;
come, tell of the wonders he's done.
Strong is the Spirit within,
is the boldness to speak,
is the power to run when we're weak ;
come, come let us sing to our God.

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Kristyn Getty (b. 1980)

We pray: Mighty God, we gather in humility to worship you. Caring God, we bring to you our concerns. Glorious God, we exalt your holy name. Unite us – even though at this time we must worship apart. Make us one in you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that your love may strengthen and empower us. **Amen.**

Our passage for today is Ephesians 1:15-23 Good News Translation (GNT)

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks to God for you. I remember you in my prayers ¹⁷ and ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you the Spirit, who will make you wise and reveal God to you, so that you will know him. ¹⁸ I ask that your minds may be opened to see his light, so that you will know what is the hope to which he has called you, how rich are the wonderful blessings he promises his people, ¹⁹ and how very great is his power at work in us who believe. This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ which he used when he raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world. ²¹ Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, and lords; he has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and in the next. ²² God put all things under Christ's feet and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things. ²³ The church is Christ's body, the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere.^[a]

Comment: What gets you up in the morning? What energizes you? Now may be a difficult time to answer that question. Our usual patterns and the expectations that may normally energize us have probably been taken away or altered by the current lockdown.

It is important for us to remember that even though life is different now we are still known and loved and valued. We each have a part to play and God, through the gift of God's Spirit, is with us and will give us an energizing hope – "the hope to which we are called".



Many of the first-century Christians struggled with their energy levels. Some will have been in a kind of lockdown because of persecution, they may even like St. Paul have gone to prison. They lived in a world full of other gods. In the Roman world of the first century the emperors were treated as gods. Caesar Augustus, pictured here, was the same emperor who was ruler when Jesus was born. Caesar and the emperors who came after him had their images everywhere. They dominated the landscape often literally through statues and architecture, as well as in terms of directing people's lives.

Christianity came into existence in this Roman world. Paul wrote to the first Christians in Ephesus to encourage them to see Jesus as far more powerful and impressive than any earthly authority. In our passage today he lifts hearts and minds to the most exalted place imaginable – the right hand of God – and invites his readers to see Jesus there. "The power of God, not Rome, has had the last word on Jesus' life, and that same power fills his now-earthly body, the Church (vv.22-23). That imagine and the knowledge that this power is with them should fill them with hope" (From Roots for the church Ltd).

From early times the followers of Jesus started to make their own pictures of Jesus. There are many artistic impressions of what Jesus ascended and glorified could look like (for example see this painting from an Italian church). As Protestants in the reformed tradition that's not been our way. But we do like to sing our pictures of Jesus. Perhaps that's what will help us to keep the image of the power of Jesus with us and give us hope. We can encourage each other also, perhaps, by taking a leaf from the athlete's book.



For this is usually the time in the year for marathon runs, cycle races and other sporting fixtures. As well as training, its often the encouragement of the crowds watching that help the sports men and women to keep going. In fact, as the Premier football league bosses think about finishing their season in empty stadiums there is a real concern about how the lack of the encouragement of the fans will affect them. Applauding is important. For weeks on Thursday nights many of us have been standing outside to applaud the NHS and key workers who are working so very hard during the current pandemic. We literally clap our hands. And it does us good. St Paul starts today's passage by sharing how he prays for the Ephesians, thanking God for their faith and love. Paul "claps them on" by praying and telling them that he does this. Is this thinking of others and praying them on something we can do to share the power we have from God's Spirit?

The passage above from Ephesians reminds us of the "hope to which He has called" us. Pentecost gives us more reasons for hope. For the account in Acts chapter 2 gives us a vision of the power of God's presence with the first disciples in their lives. We can add this to the glorious picture of the all-ruling Christ painted in words by St Paul in Ephesians chapter 1. The experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost certainly fired up the disciples and they shared the power they had by telling the good news to many people. As we look to the future, we might like to ask for an experience of God's Spirit with us that will help us to share God's good news and reshape our church to serve the changing times.

A talk about our passage can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ga6ZZUw-oXs&t=3s>

A conversation between Roberta Topham, Michael Noble and Chris Mannall about the "fire of the Spirit" can also be found at the Christchurch YouTube channel from 8 am on Sunday 31st May. Here's the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uZCmRnRWgk>

Prayers for Pentecost Sunday (adapted from Roots for the Church Ltd)

Holy Spirit of peace,
we pray for homes and nations where there is discord and conflict.
Pour out your breath of peace that people
may listen to each other;
may respect one another;
may honour each other.
Holy Spirit, hear us.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Holy Spirit of hope,
we pray for those who live with anxiety;
for those who struggle to find purpose in their lives;
for those who are worried about the way ahead;
for those who feel very alone.
Pour out your Spirit to make us wise
May we see God with us in all situations
Holy Spirit, hear us.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Holy Spirit of unity,
we pray for your Church,
for its ministry to the faithful;
for its mission to the world.
May the Spirit of Pentecost breathe upon us,
that we may witness to the world
the comfort, meaning and love that you offer.

Heal our differences and make us one in you.

Holy Spirit, hear us.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

In the name of our Saviour we pray.

Amen.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 391 May be sung or used as a prayer for ourselves and our churches:

O breath of life, come sweeping through us,
revive your Church with life and power;
O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
and fit your church to meet this hour.

O wind of God, come, bend us, break us,
till humbly we confess our need;
then in your tenderness remake us,
revive, restore; for this we plead.

O breath of love, come, breathe within us,
renewing thought and will and heart;
come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,
revive your church in every part.

Bessie Porter Head



A sending out prayer

May the power of the Spirit challenge you.

May the peace of the Spirit comfort you.

May the presence of the Spirit enable you to live in love and service in the name of Christ.

Amen.

The blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us all and those we love, this day and evermore. Amen.

Reflection material prepared by Rev Roberta Topham, drawing on material from *Singing the Faith*, prayers and part of the comment from © ROOTS for Churches Ltd (www.rootsontheweb.com) 2002-2020 & the Christchurch Word Content Group. CCLI 5560