

**WESTMINSTER CHURCH
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6A 3B5**

**“Trusting God, nurturing disciples for Christ,
being empowered by the Holy Spirit”**

**May 29th, 2022
Ascension Sunday**

...We Gather to Worship God...

(Victoria - Introit - 268 All hail Jesus)

Call to Worship - inspired by Psalm 47

- Ascended God, we praise you for the mighty power of your royal reign!
- **Glorious and Righteous King of all things: we come today to worship you.**
- Ascending God, we give thanks for your continuing reign of truth and love.
- **“Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise...!”**

Announcements: We are glad you are with us today and welcome your online voices joining with us in praise and in prayer.

Birthday Train: Today is Susan Myers’ birthday. Tomorrow is Grace Scoffield’s birthday.

Baby Bottle Campaign: You can fill a bottle physically with change and bring it back on Father’s Day, or go online to www.algomapregnancy.com and click on the links for the Baby Bottle Campaign and fill a virtual Baby Bottle.

June Communion Date: June 12th (Victoria - June 5th)

Stewardship:

At this time Session would like to encourage the congregation to consider several ways to continue your contributions to Westminster Church. If you are already on PAR (Pre-Authorized

Remittance) we thank you for your continued support. You may use the regular mail. You may use the Brock Street mail slot and drop it off if you are passing by (cheques only please). You may use e-transfer to office@westminsterchurch.ca. You may prayerfully consider joining PAR. We thank you for your continued prayerful and financial support of our mission at Westminster.

Hymn: 267 Rejoice the Lord is King (Victoria - 416 Blessed Jesus at Your word)

Opening Prayer:

Lord of life, we do not know the face of the future, any more than your disciples did.

Like them, we have many questions: how to live; how to bear witness.

Like them, we thirst for the spring waters of the Spirit to inspire us in our living to give us a heart language in our testimony.

For while we claim to celebrate the ascension of Jesus Christ, the way we live often proclaims our lack of faith.

So we must confess the incongruity between our faith and practice.

We come, O Lord, on this day of glory to confess our lack of trust.

While we sing of your lordship over all creation, we have too often acted as though you are powerless in the face of today's events.

Help us to live with confidence in your presence today and in hope for life with you forever.

We ask this in Jesus' Name. And pray as he taught us to pray saying, Our Father.....

Amen

Music by Peter

...We Listen to God's Word...

Word of God:

- **Old Testament:** Psalm 47
- **New Testament:** Luke 24: 44-53; John 15:9-17

Hymn: 706 Come let us sing of a wonderful love (Victoria -372 -Praise Him, praise Him)

Message:

This is Ascension Sunday. Well, I am calling it Ascension Sunday because Ascension Day was actually Thursday. The Ascension of Jesus signals that the fifty days after Easter are almost finished and next Sunday will be Pentecost.

Usually I find Ascension Sunday something that should be recognized and not that difficult to write about and present. This week, however, I am finding it difficult. I am having a difficult time thinking about the three mass shootings that happened in the last two weeks in the United States which are so horrific and nonsensical with the joy in which the gospel of Luke describes the ascension. Actually, I am having difficulty with the statistic that I heard this week that said there is a mass shooting - that would be four or more people killed - every day in the United States. That is a great deal of hate, anger and cruelty.

However, I found this helpful. One person pointed out that this last chapter of the gospel of Luke could have been written at the time of the destruction of the temple - and to be fair a good part of Jerusalem. Along with the destruction of the temple would have been the killing of many Jewish people. Rome kept control of its provinces by force. Sometimes I forget how brutal the Roman military machine could be. If one destroys every thing including people in one's path, the people will soon do what they are supposed to do. They were into a campaign of fear and terror. Even if the gospel was written a little before the destruction of the temple, there seemed to be a sense that this was going to happen.

Luke is reminding the Christians who have moved out of Jerusalem and up into the northern region of Galilee away from the Roman soldiers that they worship God whom they know in Jesus Christ. They need to remember the awe that they had for the power that Jesus Christ demonstrated that he had and used among them. It was the power to heal people. It was the power to feed people. It was the power to calm storms that threatened people. They needed to remember that Jesus' death was not his destruction but a showing of Godly power in his suffering, death and resurrection. God could go into those places of suffering and death and find life. Offer life.

I have heard and preached about the ascension, the time where Jesus sends the disciple out to all the nations starting in Jerusalem to tell everyone about the risen Christ. In the gospel of Luke, we see that the message that the disciples are bring with them is about the repentance or the life changing experience that they had and the forgiveness of sins that they found in Jesus Christ. After all Jesus calls them to be the witnesses.

I have been fascinated by those words - repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Why would the disciples need to be reminded of repentance and the forgiveness of sins? Who would they have to forgive to take the message of Christ to them? Where they fearful and angry?

We are told that they were fearful. The disciples were hiding in an upper room from those who had crucified Jesus. I would imagine that they were probably angry as well. Angry at those who supported the crucifixion. Angry at those who killed Jesus. Angry at Judas who betrayed Jesus. Angry at themselves for not being willing to go with Jesus to the cross.

I just noticed this week that the gospel of Luke keeps reminding the readers that Jesus keeps interpreting the Old Testament showing that the Messiah was going to suffer, die and be resurrected. This was the prophesy. This was God's plan. The disciples did not need to take revenge on behalf of God. They did not need to blame themselves for not being stronger, more powerful, more dedicated. Jesus makes that very clear that this was not what he needed or wanted. They were not to resort to hatred and cruelty on his behalf. If Jesus had wanted to go that route He could have done that himself. This was never the path of the Messiah.

I am going to go back to the gospel of John where Jesus tells the disciples so many things during the last supper. He tells them that they are to love one another. He tells them that they are to abide in God, the source of this love. They are to follow in the ways that Jesus has taught them. They are to find ways to care for the people around them. This is also a message to the first readers of these gospels. By the time the gospels were being written, there was a great deal of violence happening. They are not to get caught up in the cruelty of the day and get lost in the hate. They were to care about people because the gospel is a promise that there is repentance and forgiveness.

Our friend had been bugging us for weeks now to watch the movie entitled "A street cat named Bob". We finally took the time to watch it on Monday evening. He said that we would like it and we did. The story is about James Bowen, a real person living in London, England, who was befriended by a cat during the time that he was trying desperately to quit drugs and turn his life around. When Bob first found James, James tried to find the cat's owner because he was very sure that he would forget to look after the cat. He was just scared that he would not take care of it properly. Of course, Bob had decided that he was living with James. So James took him everywhere with him because his housing situation was not that safe. He did not want to leave Bob at the housing project. There are great shots of Bob riding on James' shoulder with his harness on to keep him safe.

What struck me about this movie was the ability of this cat to make James care enough about his life to get clean from drugs and live in society again. Social services provided just enough that the scales might tip in his favour to get off of drugs. They could not care enough for him like Bob did. It was interesting to see people react to him differently when he was with Bob. Suddenly James was a novelty and people paid attention to his busking. Some also looked out for him and brought gifts of food and tiny knitted scarves for Bob. One person called out to James using the term 'sir' and that was when he knew his life had actually changed. No one had ever called him 'sir' before. Lots of other names but a term of respect. This all happened because of Bob, the cat. I have wondered while writing this sermon if God sent the cat because no one else seemed to be caring enough for this person. Would God do that?

Somehow, when we hear the words in the gospel of John, they sound easy. Sure, we can love one another. We can get along with each other. But when relationships become difficult and are

broken then I think we become more hesitant about living by Jesus commandment in the gospel of John. We find those words of forgiveness and repentance in the gospel of Luke as possibly unattainable. Yet, God believes it is possible.

I am wondering as everyone is analysing what went wrong in Uvalde, Texas, if there was a teenager who needed someone to care a little more about him and what he was doing. I do know a couple of things about him even at this distance. He was lost and he did not know how to care for those around him. And no one took the time to notice how lost he was.

The disciples are called in the gospel of Luke to start in Jerusalem. I hear this as a call to start where you are. We are here and there are lots of people here who need to know about forgiveness, about repentance and about caring. John spoke last week about us needing to learn about this ourselves. We need to believe that we are needed here. As we learn this, we need to continually share this need. This is where God says that lives can be changed. This is where the power of God's Spirit is.

...We Respond in Service...

Prayers of the People:

Holy One, we gaze towards misty heavens knowing you were just with us, and now you are gone.

We watch the skies for just a glimpse of your dazzling grace, and you send us messages through people, to bring our hearts and minds and soul back into our lives, our bodies, this very present moment, where your presence is more difficult to see in the midst of war, of random killing sprees, still-missing Nigerian school girls, bloody revolutions, and random thoughtless cruelty.

Your angels who look like people come to us through the ordinary moments, reminding us to pray in spite of and because of...

Your angels who look like people remind us that You indeed will empower us to be your light and life and hope in this world, to the ends of the earth, wherever courage and grace is needed.

We are your people, God, and as much as we love sky-gazing, we know that you call us to give witness in the middle of terror, anxiety, illness, death, and apathy.

Help us to listen deeply, see far and wide, and live faithfully.

We pray for those who are having a tough time believing in You because of the violence that they have experienced around them:

- we pray for the people of Ukraine - may they not lose hope
- we pray for the people of Uvalde - may they not get swallowed up by pain and anger
- we pray for ourselves - that we might be witnesses to Your love and compassion even when we are unsure of that ourselves.

Be with us, we pray, Amen

Hymn: 265 - Hail the day that sees Christ rise

Benediction

Prayers – Wednesday May 25, 2022

Praise Reports

Julie has recuperated from her heart attack and is doing well.

Ariahna has recovered completely from Covid and her joyful spirit has not be subdued by the choking she experienced. She still continues to smile.

An OES puppy that was lost on March 14th because of the explosions when the family was fleeing from Mariupol has been found in Mariupol alive and doing well.

Birthdays this week: We have one VERY special young woman celebrating her birthday next week, and that is Vera McCron on Thursday May 26.

Prayers

We will begin by praying for the families involved in the shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. The number of dead is now 21.

This evening, Lord, as children have come home from another day at school, we pray for those parents whose children did not come home yesterday.

Like Rachel, we mourn, we cry out in grief, our voices join others in lamentations, for the children who went to school yesterday for the last time.

And we ask, how many more must die, how many more families must be torn apart before something is done, before people open their eyes, and see that change must happen.

Grant comfort to the grieving, Lord, wisdom to the law-makers. May we never again wake up to news of the death of innocents. - Katherine Burgess

We continue to pray for congregations of Irvine Taiwanese Presbyterian church and Geneva Presbyterian church of Laguna Woods, California as one person was killed and five were wounded last Sunday during the Taiwanese service. Lord, may they look to you for strength and may they find comfort in your word.

We pray for those who were involved in the shooting in the Buffalo store a week ago. Be with those who are grieving and those who are injured. May they heal well and not live in fear, but in your strength. May they not feel forgotten as the next tragedy has happened.

We pray for all of those who lost so much in the tornadoes that went through Gaylord and Ontario. We pray for those who lost loved ones. Be with them in their grief. It is hard to believe that a storm could do so much damage and create so much chaos. Help those who are trying to sort out the mess and put people's lives back together. We also pray for those who are still without power. May they have what they need and may their lives return to normal soon.

We pray for those families that were connected to the plane that went down two months ago. Lord, we know that it was not the ending that they wanted but at least they will know what happened. Be with the families.

Pray for those who are suffering and working through mental health issues. We particularly pray for a person who is struggling again with depression and feelings of negative self worth. Be with him, Lord. Help him to see he is worthy because he is loved. Lord help us to listen and care, be with all who are suffering.

Lord we lift up those dealing with cancer.

- We pray for Melinda's, Uncle Ronny, who is waiting for a space at Arch. Be with the his wife and family as they wait. May they all know your comfort and care at this time.
- We pray for Charlotte, and for Peter's sister-in-law. We pray for Grayson, he has battled for two years now and we pray he beats this disease.

- We pray for a gentleman who was diagnosed a few weeks ago and ask for Your Comfort and Peace in that family as they await news of a treatment plan and prognosis.
- Lord may all battling cancer receive good care, comfort and peace.

We continue to pray for Charity who had spinal surgery. She is home now but feeling a little overwhelmed. Lord, we pray that she will be able to manage her prescriptions and look after herself until she has some help on Friday. Be with her, Lord.

We pray for a young mother who is in need of your comfort and care at this time.

We pray for Mary Anne, a business colleague of Melinda, whose husband has to have open heart surgery in Sudbury. Be with them as they wait for a date, Lord, and give them courage to face this event.

We pray for a mother named Melissa whose husband died very suddenly and she is left with two young children ages 4 and 6. She is struggling. Lord, please place people around her who are able to help. We pray that she will turn to you, Lord, for strength and comfort.

We lift up Les Dool and pray for complete healing from shingles.

We pray for Jackie in his ongoing health struggles.

We continue to pray Emily Michaud as she recovers from her broken ankle.

We pray for Emily's friend who is in need of an apartment for June 1st. Help her, Lord, to find a place to live.

We pray for Josie in her ongoing rehab and pray for restoration to good health.

Lord, may all of these folks be healed and have comfort and know God's Presence

We pray for Susan's nephew Derek who is participating in a 50km cycling event in Toronto on Saturday. May he have safety on his ride and may he do well at raising funds for youth mental health.

We pray for Carol and Adam Lord, please give Carol wisdom and perseverance in this relationship with her son. Help Adam to receive insight from You Lord.

We thank you, Lord, that we are able to bring all of these concerns and requests to you. Amen