**Worship sheet for Sunday 16th May 2021 (Ascension Sunday)**

**Compiled by Revd. Pam Siddall of Buckden Methodist Church**

**Call to Worship: ‘**How awesome is the Lord, the Most High, the great King over all the earth! .... God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets. Sing praise to God, sing praises. Sing praises to our King, sing praises.” (parts of Psalm 47)

**Hymn:** Crown Him with many crowns - **Singing the Faith 347 or Hymns and Psalms 255**

**Prayers**: “God put his power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in

 the heavenly places.” (Eph. 1, 20)

 God of glory we worship you.

 Risen, ascended Lord Jesus we praise you.

 Holy Spirit of Jesus, present with us now, open our hearts and minds to whole-heartedly worship and praise

 the Lord our God.

**We say the Lord’s Prayer remembering all the family of God who will be praying it alongside us at this time.**

**Reading**: Acts 1: 4-11

**Reflection:** *Spend a little time in prayerful contemplation, putting yourself in the place of one of those disciples as Jesus was hidden from their sight. This is a significant turning-point in their relationship with Jesus and in their understanding of who he really is. How might you have been feeling then at that critical moment of change, on the cusp of a new and different way forward? They are challenged to be witnesses but are left with a sense of loss and bewilderment, without the physical presence of Jesus or a clear vision of the way ahead. How are* ***you*** *feeling at this moment as we stand at a significant turning-point of our own, on the cusp of our society opening up again post the Covid restrictions? Things will be different and as yet we don’t quite know how personal life, not to mention Church life, will work out. Perhaps we have a mix of emotions, both joyful and fearful. Bring any concerns and uncertainties to Jesus in a time of quiet now.*

**Prayer of confession:** Lord Jesus,we confess that sometimes our faith is weak and our attention wavering. Like the disciples, we often stand puzzled and fearful rather that going forward in active, trusting faith. As we move, in the coming week, towards the affirmation of Pentecost (which we’ll celebrate next Sunday) please renew and forgive us and help us to wait in absolute expectation of the empowerment of your spirit to enter our hearts. Thank you for the assurance of your forgiving love. **Amen**

**Hymn**: Rejoice the Lord is king - **Singing the Faith 355 or Hymns and Psalms 243**

**Reading: Mark 16, 15-20**

**The message of Ascension:**

Isit just me, or was Ascension-tide once a much bigger event than it is today? I’m sure I remember, as a child in the 1950s, getting a half-holiday for Ascension Day, though I very much doubt if I understood what it was all about! Nowadays I should imagine none but quite committed church-going Christians were even aware of last Thursday’s significance at all. Such understanding as folk may have is very likely clouded by artist’s impressions of days gone by showing an ethereal Jesus floating, cloud-swathed, above the disciples’ heads, or worse still, a pair of feet dangling down from a cloud!! We are intelligent people, as were those early Christian followers, and we must not be afraid to look beyond the picture to the meaning of the Ascension of Jesus.

What is Luke saying to us in Acts chapter 1? (*Luke is the only writer who describes the ascension in quite this way and the ending of Mark’s gospel, a later addition to his original text, seems to derive from Luke*.) Luke’s original readers were no less capable than ourselves of understanding the metaphorical implication of the idea of rising high. When we speak of ‘going to the top of the class’ we don’t for a moment picture a good student dangling from the ceiling like a scene from Mary Poppins! In our recent elections, candidates were voted into ‘high office’ and we know that’s about responsibility and, we hope, ability, not distance above the ground. When I was in the top class of the junior school, our teacher was keen to get us to raise our sights and our standards and so made us head every piece of written work with the motto: ‘Look high; aim high.’ I can’t quite source the quotation but she was a Christian woman and I’m sure she meant us to keep our eyes on Jesus and try to do our very best in life. So, we can understand that the Ascension is a revelation of the nature of Jesus, the highest and the greatest, seated at the right hand of God the Father, above all earthly powers and considerations in very much more than a physical sense. Calvin’s view was that “it does not say Jesus is in a definite place but that he has entered upon a particular function, which is to be prophet, priest and king.” We are told he “intercedes for us” (Heb. 7, 25) which is a wonderful, comforting thing to know.

Charles Wesley, in his great hymn of the incarnation, expressed the wonder of “our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.” Jesus emptied out his heavenly self for us and came to us as a living person, teaching his disciples to know him as brother and friend as well as Master and Lord. Our reading today shows them beginning to comprehend the necessity for Jesus, now, to return to all the fullness of the God-head with “all authority in heaven and earth” (Matt. 28, 13) belonging to him, no-longer self-restricted to ministry in one place and time in Palestine. Luke, in our reading today, is setting the scene for describing the thrilling tales of the lives and exploits of the apostles empowered and authorised by their ascended Lord, whilst Mark vividly portrays their commissioning and their mission. Mark tells us that the disciples “went out and preached everywhere and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.” We, too, are under that missionary command which the early church received from her ascending Lord and if that seems a scary prospect, simply cling onto these words: “the Lord worked with them”( Mark 16, 20). They have been shown their purpose; now help is on its way. They are not to minister alone for God will empower them with the coming of his Spirit ….. but that’s next week’s joyful story.

**Ascension Day** (from ‘Sounding the Seasons’ by Malcolm Guite)

We saw his light break through the cloud of glory

Whilst we were rooted still in time and place,

As earth became a part of heaven’s story

And heaven opened to his human face.

We saw him go and yet we were not parted

He took us with him to the heart of things,

The heart that broke for all the broken-hearted

Is whole and heaven-centred now, and sings;

Sings in the strength that rises out of weakness,

Sings through the clouds that veil him from our sight,

Whilst we ourselves become his clouds of witness

And sing the waning darkness into light;

His light in us and ours in him concealed,

Which all creation waits to see revealed.

**Challenge:** Acts 1, 8: What can you do during this week leading up to Pentecost to prepare your hearts to receive afresh that ‘power from on high’? Are you a good witness? What can stories can you tell of your own life to illustrate to others God’s goodness and love at work in the world?

Mark 16, v. 15: “Jesus said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” Where will you find opportunities to preach the good news this week?

**Hymn:** Ye servants of God, your master pro-claim – **Singing the Faith 340 or Hymns and Psalms 278**

**Prayers for others:**

As we hold out to God the concerns of our hearts we may among other things remember:

\*Those Churches preparing to re-open on Pentecost Sunday. We pray for the witness of the Church throughout the world to bring Love, comfort, hope and, yes, challenge in these difficult times.

\*Those suffering most grievously from the pandemic, such as the people of India.

\*The work of Christian Aid as we reach the end of Christian Aid Week.

\*Those in places of conflict such as Jerusalem. May peace and justice arise to calm the storms.

\*Those recently appointed to high office in the local elections that they may serve with integrity.

\*Those in need of raising up in any way, especially those suffering with mental health issues.

These and all our prayer we comment in perfect trust and faith to Jesus our Saviour. **Amen**

*Our final hymn ends by pointing us forward to the coming of the Spirit which we shall be celebrating next Sunday.*

**Hymn:** Jesus is Lord – **Singing the Faith 353 or Hymns and Psalms 260**

**Blessing: We go in peace in the power of the Spirit to love and serve the Lord. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest on each one and on those for whom we’ve prayed. Amen**.