



Living in Christ: The hope to which we are called

A service outline for 24 May 2020
"Ascension Sunday"

We continue on our six-week series following themes from the Methodist 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? It would be great if you could send that to Roberta to share with the wider church family:

rev.robertatopham@gmail.com or post it on the Christchurch Facebook group.

***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. Our first song focuses on the awesome nature of Jesus:

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>

- 1 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 – make us one in you, that your love may strengthen and empower us. **Amen.**

A way into today's Bible reading: A prayer for God to "open the eyes of our heart":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vnqb7Vn4AEE>

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.

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 energise 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.



Many of the first-century Christians struggled with their energy levels. Some will have been in a kind of lockdown because of persecution. 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 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 (eg 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 that 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. At the moment, on Thursday nights many of us stand outside to applaud the NHS and key workers. 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?

Some questions to think about:

1. From the gospel books about Jesus, and the letters of the apostles, for you, which passages capture Jesus at his most powerful?
2. How can we express the power and glory of Jesus most strongly in our current time and place?
3. Who might you "clap on" through prayer today?
4. Is there someone you might contact to offer "the hope of God in Christ"?

We sing: Singing the Faith 327 Jesus is Lord ad I will extol him (note verse 2 "We have a hope that is steadfast and certain").

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxLvVNgBQic>

Prayers

A "world ablaze" mandala from Daisy Barnes a writer for *Roots* (materials for the churches). A mandala is a picture that is used to help meditation and prayer



A prayer reflection

It's difficult to live with uncertainty.

However bad a situation,

knowing what you have to face

means that you can start coming to terms with it, facing your fears,

planning your strategy.

When the 'big picture' is too big or too blurred and indistinct,

it's easier to focus on small details,

to try to control what you can.

The world has changed,

how does that affect our living in the meantime?

How do I need to change?

How do I want to change?

Is it possible to live each day as a new opportunity, while knowing that it feels the same as yesterday?

I need your help, God,

to listen for you in the clamour of voices calling for my attention,

to focus on you in the midst of competing priorities,

to trust you in this time of uncertainty. Amen.

When life is difficult

When life is difficult,

I believe in me (hand on heart),

because I believe in you (point upwards),

and you believe in me

(hands across chest, as in a hug).

When I am faced with a challenge,

I believe in me (hand on heart),

because I believe in you (point upwards),

and you believe in me

(hands across chest, as in a hug).

When I struggle to do the right thing,

I believe in me (hand on heart),

because I believe in you (point upwards),

and you believe in me

(hands across chest, as in a hug).

When I feel down,
I believe in me (hand on heart),
because I believe in you (point upwards),
and you believe in me
(hands across chest, as in a hug).

Jesus, when we receive you and believe in your name
Jesus, when we receive you and believe in your name,
You give us power to become children of God.
When we are lonely,
help us to remember
We are the children of God.
When we are scared,
help us to remember
We are the children of God.
When we are hurting,
help us to remember
We are the children of God.
When we are sad,
help us to remember
We are the children of God.
Fill us with the power of your love,
Now and always.
Amen.

All around the world

Lord Jesus, all around the world
your followers are facing difficult times.
Please protect them from harm
and help them build their faith in you.
Amen.

Songs: Lord I lift your name on high (This is an upbeat youth led version of this song – from a church in Canada).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tWSu9NAFIk>

Blessing: Send us onward O Lord, with our feet on the ground and our eyes on Jesus, hope in our heart and your power in our lives. **And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us this day and always. Amen.**

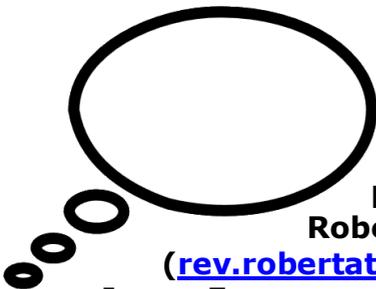
Sending song: From South African *Thuma Mina* (send me Jesus): find a version to join with here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eik2HK7u9xA>

Or listen to this jazz version of *Thuma Mina* by the song's writer Hugh Masekela who applies it to concern for real life situations in South Africa. From the comments written it is clear that the song has been taken up to give encouragement in the current fight against covid-19 in South Africa.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oz-JHeLIlg>

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



If you want to share any thoughts or reflections arising from this service material then please do get in touch with

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Thank you!