



Abington Pastoral Letter No.14 27.05.2020

Dear Friends

The Message of Ascension in the pandemic

On Sunday during our online worship we read the story of Ascension again. I know some people who struggle with Ascension. They find it a bit puzzling, a bit strange. But I think Ascension captures what is at the heart of Christian faith.

Ascension is about God's vision and promise for us and for our world. Firstly, it is the promise of the holy spirit. Ascension means Christ's ministry and his power is no longer bound by his physical presence. He now comes into everyone's heart. He knocks on the door of every heart of every home. In the same way, God's presence is no longer confined in a temple. Since he has made our hearts as his dwelling place. Now we are the temple. We are the church. People meet with God through us.

"The Father has made you a promise which I told you about before. Wait here to receive this promise. John baptized people with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1.5)

Secondly, Ascension points for us where our eyes should be directed at. In a way Ascension was a sad occasion because it meant the final definite farewell with Jesus in the flesh. And the Bible tell us,

'As he was going, they were looking into the sky.' (Acts 1. 10)

Christians are those who look up; who seeks the things above; who choose higher ground even when the lower path offers more. When things go wrong, it is so easy to just focus on everything that is wrong. Throughout the history, when there was a tragedy or suffering, Christians always looked up and by doing so they guided the society to higher ground. In these difficult times,

once again, the Bible tells us to look up, to seek higher values, and to rebuild our society on those values, knowing that God is for us and with us. When everyone is looking down and is overwhelmed by their grief, sorrow and despair, God sends his people to invite them to lift their heads, lift their hearts and to look up.

Finally, Ascension tells us that there is more to our life than the life on this earth. Not just that but that there is more to God's creation and that we are part of the greater creation.

We don't even fully understand what is there in the deep ocean. So how could we say there is nothing beyond this earthly world simply because we cannot see? We don't even fully understand our body. So how could we say that there is nothing more to us than our physical body? God has given us this life and created this world. And there is more to them than we can see or imagine. And if we really believe that then we can treat our planet better than treating it as another form of fuel. We can treat other people better than treating them as another mean for profit. And most importantly we can see and treat ourselves better and by doing so, we can understand how God sees us and treats us.

Last week was the mental health awareness week. So many people suffer from mental health. What does it say to us? It says to us that it is now time to treat ourselves, others and our planet better. There is more to us and there is more to this world. We are not just material beings. We are more than even spiritual beings. We are the creation of God, the children of God. The disciples were allowed to take a glimpse of that truth in the event of Ascension.

Friends, our story is part of the larger story. Our life on this earth is not the final destination. Its only one part of the journey. And we are all part of something greater than our own life. We have been enjoying our online worship. Although it might appear that I am the one who is doing all the tricks, actually that is not the truth. The truth is our worship is built by everyone's contribution. That is why our worship is so alive and rich. In the same way, God invites you to continue to contribute to building his Kingdom that may not be seen but real; the Kingdom that is built upon higher values that lead people to higher ground in this pandemic.

After the Ascension, the disciples went back to Jerusalem to share that vision of God with others, to tell them to look up, knowing that they will meet again with Christ face to face when they depart from this earth only to begin a new journey but being held by the same God.

"Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking into the sky? You saw Jesus taken away from you into heaven. He will come back in the same way you saw him go." Then they went back to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. (Acts 1. 11-12)

In my previous pastoral letter, I have shared with you my interest in Tolkien's world. Today I would like to share with you a song of a musician that I admire. That musician is Stevie Wonder. Some of you might be very familiar with his music. He is a blind musician, famous for his funky style music. He is also a lifelong Christian. He wrote a song 'Higher Ground'. It was written more than 45 years ago. And yet his words bear the truth in the current world we are living in.

Higher Ground by Stevie Wonder

People keep on learnin'
Soldiers keep on warrin'
World keep on turnin'
Cause it won't be too long.

Powers keep on lyin'
While your people keep on dyin'
World keep on turnin'
Cause it won't be too long.

I'm so darn glad he let me try it again
Cause my last time on earth I lived a whole world of sin
I'm so glad that I know more than I knew then
Gonna keep on tryin'
Till I reach my highest ground.

Teachers keep on teachin'
Preachers keep on preachin'
World keep on turnin'
Cause it won't be too long.

Lovers keep on lovin'
Believers keep on believin'
Sleepers just stop sleepin'
Cause it won't be too long.

I'm so glad that he let me try it again
Cause my last time on earth I lived a whole world of sin
I'm so glad that I know more than I knew then

Alison 20th Anniversary as a Reader

Alison has shared with me that a couple of weeks ago, it was her 20th anniversary as a Reader in Abington. Many congratulations to Alison. We thank her for her ministry and look forward to being inspired by her and working together with her for the Kingdom. We will have the opportunity to hear from Alison more about her reflections on this.

Weekly Zoom Prayer Meeting

Liz Kelly is preparing a weekly prayer meeting using Zoom where people can have a chat and pray together during the weekdays. It will be on Thursday at 10.00 am. It will include Common Worship Daily Prayer, a psalm, Bible reading and prayers. There will be space for individuals to pray their own petitions so that we may all join in fellowship in praying for each other. Please contact Liz at lizmk@outlook.com if you are interested in this service or if you have any request or suggestions. You will need to install Zoom on your smartphone or laptop. You can download it from here <https://zoom.us/download>. We will continue to look into ways to provide support and pastoral care while the virus is around.

That is all from me for this week. Let us continue to walk together towards higher ground.

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. (1Peter 3.13-18)

With love in Christ

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