

RYDE BAPTIST CHURCH SUNDAY SERVICE

24 May 2020—Ascension

bereaved, this won't last, for help is on its way. And this will transform their understanding of who Jesus is and what their purpose is forever.

Mission. The second positive confirms that 'you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' No wonder they need the power. This is some job description, some mission statement, utterly global in its reach and its impact, despite beginning at home. If the disciples are still concerned how the kingdom is going to be restored, this is the answer. By the Spirit in them, a new kingdom will be established which will truly fulfil the ancient covenant to be a light to all the nations on earth.

Family. One of the most significant things that brings this incredible event back to earth is not just the entreaty to stop looking up into the sky but also the domestic setting to which the apostles returned in the city, a very short walk from where they had seen Jesus ascend from the Mount of Olives. The eleven who were staying in the upper room are named: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas son of James. They will soon refill the vacant place with Matthias, but for now it is just those who have been chosen by Jesus. Back together again. This close group was joined by a number of women, named in the Gos-

pels, Mary the mother of Jesus, and also Jesus' brothers. There was clearly also a wider group, including Matthias and Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus). Here is the extended family setting from which Jesus grows his kingdom. And it is to close family community that Jesus calls us to belong. Contrary to myth, it is quite impossible to be a true follower of Jesus and not to connect with this family, his church. It is to the gathered body of disciples that Jesus promises his power and gives his mission. While waiting for the time and the power, we must do all we can to remain connected—ready for mission to begin.

SUGGESTED SONG

Lord I Lift Your Name on High
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUNdbfFI_p8

BLESSING

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.
(1 Peter 5:10-11)

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.

<https://rydebaptist.xyz>

Dear Friends,

Sometimes we experience something that is both incredible and true. When that happens, it is difficult to get our minds around. 'That can't happen, surely', we say. And yet, it just did. When at the start of the year we were looking forward to all that 2020 would hold, we'd never have believed anyone who'd have told us we'd be spending months in lockdown, that unnecessary travel would be banned, and that there would be no summer holidays to look forward to this year. Incredible. Beyond belief. And yet, it did just happen, and we are still living through it. Incredible and true. It takes experience to bring the two things together.

Such is the case with resurrection. No one comes back to life once they are dead. And yet only three days after his crucifixion, the risen Jesus is back with his disciples. Many credible witnesses confirm this during the following month, and there are several stories of really significant meetings taking place. What is more, those significant meetings continue to take place, beginning with Saul (the Apostle Paul) on the Damascus road and continuing with the risen Jesus meeting us where we are in our lives.

Now, just forty days after rising from the dead, Jesus ascends back into heaven. Another incredible story, but true. Again there are credible witnesses who have experienced the event and who later describe it to Luke who used it to end the first and start the second volume of his account of Jesus and the early church, Luke and Acts. The disciples closest to Jesus are no longer called The Twelve—how could they be, as there were now only eleven of them?—but instead are described as Apostles. They are the ones who have been commissioned with the responsibility to pass on what they have seen. They are the pioneer witnesses charged with keeping the story alive, putting into practice all that Jesus has taught and instructed them. And we follow where they lead.

Ascension continues to be our theme today as we meet online via Zoom for our Sunday Morning Fellowship Meeting at 10.30am. Our online Monday Prayer Meeting is at 7.00pm. If you are able to join us, you will be very welcome. Don't forget that if you are reading this sheet on your computer or device you can also click on the readings and songs, and that you will find many other great resources at <https://rydebaptist.xyz>

CALL TO WORSHIP

¹ May God arise, may his enemies be scattered; may his foes flee before him. ³ But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.
(Psalm 68:1,3)

BIBLE READINGS

[Psalm 68:1-10,32-35](#)

[Acts 1:6-14](#)

[1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11](#)

SUGGESTED SONG

Crown Him with Many Crowns
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vWRXvWZPUQ>

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we thank and praise you this day for your death and resurrection, and for your ascension. Thank you that you reign for all time as Lord and King. Thank you that you are not just Lord of Creation and all that has been made and can be seen and known, but that you are also Lord of our lives. Thank you that the worship cry, 'Jesus is Lord', can be heard throughout the generations and around the world. Thank you that this means you are in control and that we can put our faith, our trust and our hope in you. Thank you that you are my Lord and Saviour and that nothing can take that away from me. Amen.

TO PONDER

Back on Easter Sunday I mentioned that my Mum had this saying, 'Keep Looking Up!', and how that both inspired people and has remained an important theme of our memories of her. Keep looking up. However, there are times when we need to stop doing that! The two men in white challenged the disciples, 'Men of Galilee...why do you stand here looking into the sky?' Clearly this was not a time to keep looking up! I am reminded of the image (which surely must be based on at least some truth) of a group of council workmen looking down into a hole, whilst a lone workman with a shovel actually carries out the job. Looking up, looking down...now is the time to stop doing that and to get on with the work. We can and must ponder and plan. Dreaming is a good thing to do. We can wonder and try to work things out in our heads. There is a time to be gobsmacked in awe, and to stare into space. Yet the time also comes when we just need to get on with the things we know we need to do, putting them off no longer. What is Jesus telling you to do today?

TIME OF PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we weren't there when you ascended into heaven, but at times we are tempted like those first disciples to stand around looking up into the sky. The task is too great, the resources are

too limited, our imaginations are too full, we don't have the strength. But as you told your first disciples, you had to go in order that you could send a helper. The first disciples had to wait for the Spirit, but we don't. So please fill us with your power, strength and inspiration to be and do what is most needed this day, to your glory. Amen.

7/52 contains a lot more ideas and suggestions for prayer, as does the list of Christian mission and outreach organisations on the Ascension Day sheet—the online list contains links to their various websites for further details.

SUGGESTED SONGS

Draw Me Close to You
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_tdG9yM93A

I Will Worship With all of My Heart
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJsN358apt8>

MINI-SERMON OUTLINE

Introduction. There is so much in our reading from Acts this morning that we can only highlight a few things. For starters, the question 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' is rather a curious one. Having been through the events of the last fifty days or so, one might have thought the disciples would have understood that the means by which Jesus inaugurates and represents his kingdom is very

different from their previous revolutionary expectations, but it appears that these still linger. Jesus responds with reference to time, to power, and to mission—all set within the context of his new kingdom community, the church.

Time. That the times and dates set by God are not for them to know, should be no mystery to them (e.g. Matthew 24 -25). For now they are to wait. 'The hopes and fears of all the years' are invested in their expectations of the Messiah liberating them from their oppression. Jesus hasn't acted according to type thus far, and clearly isn't going to do so now. It isn't going to be as simple as overturning the authority of Rome, which never happens in practice as the Temple is destroyed in AD70 and the Jews finally turned out of Jerusalem. Yet the kingdom of God comes about in a more powerful and enduring way. There is still a mystery to be uncovered.

Power. Things will become much clearer, though, sooner rather than later. Their waiting is almost over. The promised helper, the paraclete—the come alongsides—is on its way, the Holy Spirit will soon make an appearance that will change things for them and for the world. After the negative 'not for you to know' come two positives beginning 'you will'. Here, 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you'. Although the disciples are felling disempowered, confused, overwhelmed and