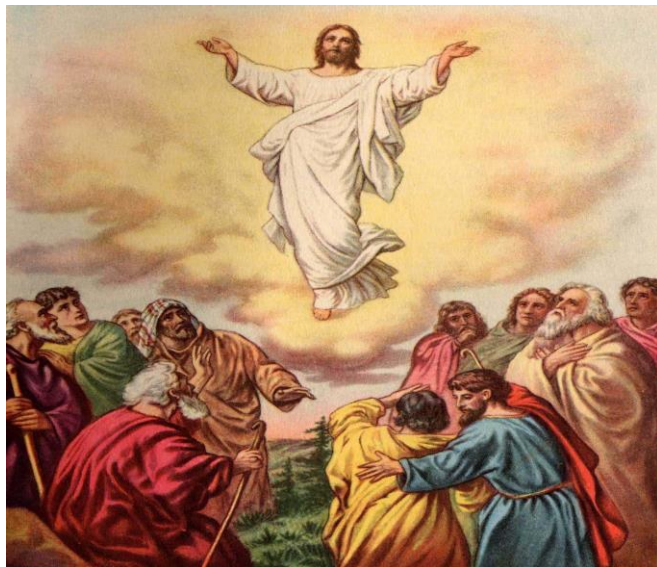


May 24, 2020
Ascension Sunday

ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Fairview Heights, IL 62208
618-397-6323

ANNOUNCEMENTS: In order to keep all of us connected further, we will be preparing and sending out a April-May-June Newsletter before the end of the month; birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, news and thinking from the Council concerning when and how we will be opening the church for in-person worship, etc. If you have some items you would like included, send me an email at gcaptain@charter.net .

Service Prayers for the Sixth Sunday of Easter



“The Ascension, as told in Acts, has always had a certain chilling edge to it, especially when viewed from the standpoint of Jesus’ followers: the loss of a leader and dear friend after seemingly having just regained that leader and friend; the end of a wondrous, life-changing era; the shift of responsibility to those who clearly do not seem ready for it.” Karoline Lewis

*Scripture texts: Psalm 68, Acts 1:1-11, 1 Peter 5:7-11,
Luke 24:14-53*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Sing to God; sing praises to God’s name.
Let all the nations bow down to worship God.
God is ruler over all creation.
God reigns over earth and the farthest heavens.
Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over all.
Listen to hear God’s mighty voice.
We are filled with God’s presence wherever we are.
We receive power and strength from God around us.
We pray together for God’s guidance.
The Holy Spirit empowers us to witness.
God draws us together as one people.
We can experience eternity in the midst of time.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

As Christ ascended to heaven, our spirits are lifted to you this day, O God. Your Spirit fills all the universe. We dwell within your embrace and cannot escape from your watchful care. You are with us here, choosing us as apostles and instructing us in the way we should go. Focus our limited understanding on the person of Jesus, that all he did and taught might come alive in us during this time of worship.

Grant to us convincing proof of your promises as we welcome your winds of change in our lives. Amen.

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Acts 1:1-11 (NRSV)

1 In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴While staying^[a] with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

The Ascension of Jesus

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, “Men of Galilee, why do

you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

MESSAGE:

For the past few Sundays our scripture texts have reminded us of the times Jesus prepared his Disciples for his departure. It sounded to me just like a teacher or professor prepping her students for a final exam; and not like an exam on paper, but more like an “on the job” training. Jesus wonders if these Disciples can perform as healers, preachers, and teachers when he is no longer with them to hold their hands. I wonder if this was a pass/fail kind of exam? And what about the Disciples? What are they thinking? Are they up to the task? Have they “crammed” enough for this test?



According to today’s scripture text, today’s the day!! Jesus is returning to his Father. (verse 9). The Disciples are facing a new reality with their friend, guide, and teacher no longer with them. What are they going to do? I imagine some of the 11 wanted to go back home? Go back to the way things were before Jesus told them to follow him? Go back to their fishing or whatever their trade was? Will things be the same as when they left 3 years ago?

Jesus told them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the promise of the Father. (Verse 4-5) They might as well wait around to see what the Holy Spirit is all about. They can always “bug out” later.

What will OUR NEW REALITY be when we return to in person worship services at church? Will it be just the same as when we left the building March 15? I can guarantee the answer is NO!

First of all, we will all have to wear masks, all of us. Our temperatures will be taken and we will have to answer questions about our exposure to the virus. Only one door will be used for entering. Once entering the sanctuary, ushers will guide you to your seats. People will be seated in every third pew to provide 6 ft of distance and they will be seated from the first of the sanctuary to the back. They will be dismissed back to the front. You can sit only with the people you have been staying at home with.

Hymnals and Bibles will be removed from the pews. There will be NO SINGING of hymns or the choir. Singing spreads particles from our lungs which could have the virus. Gratefully we have Sharon who can share her wonderful talents on the organ and piano. The service will be less than 45 minutes. (I know that's not a bad thing for some of you.)



There will be no fellowship time in the L-room and no lingering in the sanctuary or narthex to chat. You are welcome to chat with each other out on the parking lot as long as you remain 6 ft apart.

SO, DOES THAT SOUND LIKE THE WAY WE USED TO WORSHIP? Just like the Disciples, we will have a NEW REALITY. Yet it's NOT ALL BAD NEWS. We heard the comforting words of Jesus in last week's Gospel lesson in John 14:15-21. Jesus promises to send us an Advocate, the Spirit of Truth. Jesus will come to us because he lives, we will live. Jesus is in the Father. We are in Jesus and Jesus is

in us. Those who love Jesus will be loved by his Father. Jesus will love us and Jesus will reveal himself to us. And from John 14:27 ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

That is the good news of the Gospel. The Disciples stayed and we will stay, too. The Disciples waited for the Holy Spirit and we will wait until returning to our church building is safe for ALL of us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

OFFERING: Thank you for continuing your gifts to the church. The doors may be closed, but the work of the church continues.

COMMISSION AND BLESSING:

The risen Jesus appeared to friends in many ways. Christ is seen by persons today in people like us. The life and teachings of Jesus point us to God's reign. God promises to empower our witness. We will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. This is the promise Jesus made to us. Through revelation, we will know more of Christ. Through the work God gives us, we will grow. Our worship sends us out to work and witness. We scatter to continue our worship through service. God sends us out with love for all the saints. We commit ourselves to care for all God's children. Amen.

Liturgy by Rev. Lavon Bayler



**HAVE A SAFE HOLIDAY AS WE CELEBRATE
THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR ALL FOR OUR FREEDOM**

**WE REMEMBER IN PRAYER THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF
Les Sattery, Brother-in-law of Wayne Schlosser.**

ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST: Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Rich Schmitt, Cherie Klostermann, Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard, Hanna Mosco, Bill Underwood, Luke Doctolero.

**We isolate now so,
when we gather again,
no one is missing.**

Peace and Blessings, Pastor Rosemary
618-660-8894 gcaptain@charter.net

