



Sermon Based Curriculum for Small Groups

16 April – 4 June 2023

From Easter to Trinity Sunday

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Introduction

Make the most of the days between Easter and Pentecost.

In the uproar of Easter, we sometimes forget Jesus stuck around for another 40 days after resurrection. Apparently, he had more to say and do. The very first verse in the book of Acts teaches us that the gospels were about 'all that Jesus began to do and teach'. The rest of Acts teaches us that Jesus is still doing and teaching in the days, weeks, months and decades after the gospels. The work of the first-century church was the work of Jesus. Isn't that true today? It's all too easy to substitute our work for his, to engage in ministry apart from his direction. What is Jesus doing and teaching in our day?

The angels who were present at the ascension asked a pretty good question: "Why are you looking toward heaven?" (Acts 1:11). It's a question worth considering. Frequently, we are more concerned with heaven than with the Kingdom of God. The breath-taking sacrifice at Calvary purchased the forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven, but in our generation, many followers of Jesus have limited his work and message to heaven only.

Series theme: God does new things.

The theme invites believers to take Jesus seriously. Jesus' resurrection did not change lives then, lives are changed now. In Jesus, God does new things, good things.

What these notes will cover.

The Great Fifty Days of the Easter-Pentecost season and Trinity Sunday, beginning on the Sunday after Easter and concluding on Trinity Sunday. This season celebrates the resurrection and ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is the period during which the church recalls its faith in God the Holy Trinity and seeks to relate its faith as the people of God to Christ's mission to the world.

We suggest that in your devotional times you prepare for the coming Sunday by reading the passages that will be read that day. It is best for you to design your own rhythm for doing this, but here is a suggestion:

- Monday = Psalm
- Tuesday = Old Testament
- Wednesday = Gospel
- Thursday = Epistle
- Friday = Gospel again
- Saturday = Psalm again

We have underlined one reading per week. This will be the ‘controlling lesson’. The other readings will be read through the lens that it provides. Alternatively, the other readings will help us to understand the controlling lesson.

Using this booklet in your small group

This booklet is laid out so that your gathering as a home group each week will follow the four W’s rhythm of Welcome, Worship, Word, Works. I hope this helps you and makes the journey meaningful. The times in brackets are a guideline that should help to keep you on track.

Welcome (10 minutes)

This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship (10 minutes)

Use the Psalm for the week. Ask one person to read it slowly and prayerfully. As you listen to it allow this to be a moment of worship, love, devotion, adoration, thanksgiving and praise.

You can do your prayers of intercession for each other and society at this time, or at the end of the gathering.

Word (60 minutes)

Here I offer some notes on the reading and the theme for the week. You will then do a Bible Study together and discuss the theme and also the sermon you heard.

It is up to the group leader to decide whether there is enough time for all of the questions – and to select which questions to discuss if there are too many.

Prayer for Trinity

This year we are asking for Home Groups and Classes to pray for specific aspects of Trinity’s life. Suggestions for these prayers are given in the weekly notes.

See the end of this booklet for extra resources.

Sunday 16 April

Touched by Jesus' Resurrection

Welcome This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship Psalm of the week – Psalm 16

Word Read John 20:19-31 as a group.

1. Read these notes on the passage.

This week's Lectionary readings make it clear that the resurrection of Jesus is way more than just an event of the past. Every reading offers the assurance that God's life is available to us now in Christ. In both Peter's preaching and his letter, he affirms that Christ's resurrection is real and is a promise that God's life is available to all. Christ's resurrection assures us of God's care and life. In the Gospel reading, John demonstrates how Christ's resurrection inspires and empowers his disciples, and how Thomas is dramatically drawn into faith. Put together, these readings give us a basis for confidence as we face the challenges – the 'little deaths' (job losses, sickness, broken relationships, bereavements) of each day, and they invite us to experience Christ's resurrection life now, not just after we have died. So, resurrection is not just an amazing thing that happened long ago, it can be our lived experience every moment.

Can you see why the most important challenge facing us in this life is to grow our relationship with the risen Christ and the God whom he reveals?

A few helpful things in our pilgrimage.

- The resurrection narratives of Jesus remind us that the final word about our life belongs to God and not to death. They help us see that there is far more to this universe than what meets the eye.
- Once our lives have been touched by his resurrected presence, He becomes for us the Way, the Truth and the Life. As we learn to follow him, Jesus steps out of the Gospel and becomes a living presence with us.
- As we take the broken bread and take the wine, the risen Lord renews our faith and our hope in him.
- We can shape our lives and actions to reflect the pattern of Jesus' unconditional love for us.

- We can keep our hopes alive in all the situations we face, even death and dying. We must courageously turn our faces away from worry, fear and cynicism and choose to be people of hope. (Hudson T. 2003:123-124)

When we make the resurrection simply a historical fact to assent to intellectually, we lose the power it offers for daily living and service. Thomas refused to believe as an intellectual exercise just because 'everyone else' did. He insisted on discovering the resurrection for himself, even though it meant admitting his doubts and allowing himself to be proved wrong. He needed an assurance of life, but once he had received it, he was a changed and healed person.

John's disciples are glad at Jesus' appearance, not afraid as in Luke. They become models for believers.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage.

- a. Thomas doubted the resurrection of Jesus, he needs a proof in order to believe. How does this make Thomas a hero?
- b. How is John 20:31 a central focus of the gospel of John and the Christian gospel as a whole?

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a) Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point of the sermon?
- b) Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Radical Discipleship Questions

- How do we plan to use our daily experiences of God's resurrection life to work for justice, peace, simplicity in the world?"
- What signs of resurrection do we need to open our hearts and minds to in order find the assurance to keep faith, so that like Thomas, we will turn our lives into an act of worship and service.
- Every day is a miracle and a blessing. How is this enough to make us believe that Jesus really rose from the grave?

5. Reflection questions

1. What life and healing we could offer our neighbourhoods and our people if, in the Church, we welcomed doubt and recognized that failure and brokenness are universal.

2. What transformation could be experienced if we accepted people as they are – whatever that might mean – and invited them to seek in earnest after an assurance – an experience of ‘little resurrections’ – in the midst of their pain and struggle.
3. How different our impact on our communities might be if, instead of giving our energy to judgement and criticism and defensiveness, we embraced all people with the confidence of God’s life, God’s love and God’s compassion.
4. How differently we might be perceived as Christians if our faith in resurrection was less an idea which we held in our heads, and more a quality that we lived with every part of our lives. And when we’ve experienced the assurance that comes from God’s life in this way, we discover that we cannot help but be agents of resurrection in every moment, every place and every relationship we may find ourselves.

6. **Close in Prayer for Trinity**

This week we ask you to pray for:

Young Adults Home Groups to grow and strengthen, the Home service to be a thriving, growing service that is welcoming and preaches a strong message of hope for young people

7. **This Week’s lectionary readings**

Acts 2:14a, 22-32: Peter, preaching on the Day of Pentecost, proclaims that Jesus is risen and quotes from David’s Psalm (16) as a prophecy of the resurrection of Christ.

Psalms 16: A psalm of David, expressing trust in God, commitment to faithful worship, and assurance of God’s promise of resurrection – which in the New Testament is taken as a promise of Jesus’ resurrection.

1 Peter 1:3-9: Peter encourages the believers as they endure trials, reminding them of the life they have in the Risen Christ and of the joy that they will experience when their faith, having been strengthened by their suffering, leads them into fulness of life.

John 20:19-31: The resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples and breathes the Holy Spirit on them, then he appears to Thomas who had doubted the witness of the other disciples, and shows Thomas his wounds, leading Thomas to faith and worship. After telling this story, John explains the purpose of his Gospel, to show who Jesus is and to lead his readers to faith.

Sunday 23 April

Jesus enters into communication with plain, simple, ordinary humans.

Welcome This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship Psalm of the week – Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19

Word Read Luke 24:13-25 as a group.

1. Read these notes on the passage.

Only Luke reports it, and only Luke needs it: Luke’s whole story is built around going to Jerusalem and coming back home. This time people try to leave the Holy City, the center of the Jewish universe, only to be pulled back in.

We like to hear future tenses. We like it when families say that everything will be okay, that they will go on, that they will get everything back to normal. We like future tenses so much that we reward people in deep grief for reassuring us that the sun will rise tomorrow and that life will go on. But in this unguarded moment, the walking disciples give voice to a discovery that every adult shares: very often, often when it matters most, we find ourselves speaking of matters of hope and faith in the imperfect tense: we had hoped ... We can rally ourselves and polish up our future tenses when we must, but often that involves skating on thin ice over the shifting, flowing waters of past imperfections, confounding disappointments.

While they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. This is one, if not the first, fulfilment of the comforting promise, “Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.” Compare also the words of Malachi, “Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another: and the Lord took note and listened.” (Malachi 3:16). —

I wonder if Luke’s people would have heard echoes of Jesus’ wanting to walk on past the boat on Galilee (Mark 6:48) or of its inspiration:

Yahweh's walking on past Moses on Sinai and revealing only a little? Traditional hospitality ethic prevails and Jesus joins them for a meal. We and Luke's hearers know much more is at stake. Countless generations have seen in the breaking of the bread an allusion to their own eucharists - probably rightly so. I am sure the effect of Luke's story for some would have been that they, too, would have acclaimed: Christ is with us, too, whenever we break bread - and rightly so.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage.

- a. How is the appearance of Christ like a message of fraternity and divine regard, especially to plain, simple, ordinary men and women?
- b. What was Jesus' method of communication with these two disciples?
 1. Was it sympathetic?
 2. Was it instructive?
 3. Was it animating.

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a) Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point of the sermon?
- b) Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Radical Discipleship Questions

Jesus' disciples were hoping that Jesus would bring liberation for Israel. What are our hopes for our country and the whole world and how is can we work with Jesus in bring new life to the dead situations?

5. Reflection questions

Away from Christ, all is coldness in regard to God and spiritual things. Away from Christ, the most constraining motives of the gospel are heard with unconcern.

There is communion to be had with Christ.

- How does sharing in the Holy communion make you recognise Jesus?
- God's life is always breaking out whether we see it or not. How has this been true for you?
- What does it take to recognise and respond to God's things?

6. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to pray for: Pastoral Care portfolio.

Flower delivery, Intercessory prayer ministry, Senior's ministry, Proactive care.

7. This Week's lectionary readings

Acts 2:14a, 36-41: Peter continues his sermon on the Day of Pentecost and encourages his hearers to believe in Jesus as Messiah, to repent and to receive God's Spirit, and 3000 people respond.

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19: A psalm of praise, thanksgiving and commitment in response to God's gracious rescue.

1 Peter 1:17-23: Because God, through raising Christ from death, has led God's people to eternal life, we should love one another.

Luke 24:13-35: Jesus appears to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, who invite him to stay the night with them. They share a meal and, as Jesus breaks the bread, they recognise him

Sunday 30 April

Marks of having received the Word

Welcome This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship Psalm of the week-Psalm 23

Word Read Acts 2:42-47 as a group.

1. Read these notes on the passage.

If we have become accustomed to think of resurrection life as something that we receive and enjoy primarily as individuals, this week’s Lectionary readings will come as something of a shock. Through the interesting collage of metaphors – sheep and Shepherd, suffering and care, life and togetherness in the community of faith – we are drawn into recognising that the life Christ offers us is always shared. If we are to know the reality of the resurrection, we will discover it as we care for one another and share life in mutual compassion and protection.

Reflections on the Theme

This week the Lectionary offers a wonderful and rich connection of ideas. In this season of the resurrection, the life of Christ is still uppermost in our minds, and Jesus’ promise that he has come to give life is at the heart of our reflections. The rest of the Gospel, though, and the other readings, all reflect on how life is lived when the care and compassion of God direct us. In the Acts reading we are given a glimpse at the true community of the first disciples and their care for one another. In Psalm 23 we are reminded of God’s care and attention toward God’s people. In Peter’s letter, written to those who are being persecuted for Christ’s sake, there is the assurance that their suffering is not meaningless, and that it is a sharing in Christ’s sacrifice, even as God – the Shepherd and Guardian of the believers’ souls – watches over them.

Marks of having received the Word.

While it is not the purpose of this short reflection to unravel all of these metaphors, the essential message is clear – the life of Jesus is

given and received by mutual care, compassion and protection. The resurrection does not offer some individualised, blissful life. Rather, it calls us into a life that is shared with others who follow Christ, to whom we belong and for whom we are responsible, even as they are called to care for us. It is only together – in community – that Christ's life can be known and enjoyed.

Devotion to the apostles' teaching is certainly a core element. Luke, after all, seeks to serve such teaching by writing his gospel. Fellowship without learning together falls short of being Christian community.

The love God inspires knows no boundaries and need to be allowed to fruit where Christian communities hail Jesus - with gates wide open for all to share that fruit.

May we be drawn into unity and communion with God and each other as we seek for life in our worship.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage.

- a. What does Acts 2:42-47 say about the early Christian Church?
- b. After having explained the events of Pentecost, what immediate effect was produced by Peter?

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a) Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point of the sermon?
- b) Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Radical Discipleship Questions

Is your group already doing the following?

1. A public profession of faith.
 2. A desire to unite in fellowship with other believers.
 3. Continuance in the Word-Extension of the work of God
 4. Prayer and study of the Word in order to grow in grace.
- If you are not doing it, how do you plan to do it in future?

5. Reflection questions

- How did the present-day church get so far off track where our expression of faith is confined to 1-hour on Sunday mornings and seemingly nothing else?

- How dedicated are we toward fulfilling the Great Commission OUTSIDE the church walls, not within it. What more can we do?

6. **Close in Prayer for Trinity**

This week we ask you to pray for... Pastoral Care portfolio.

Flower delivery, Intercessory prayer ministry, Seniors' ministry, Proactive care.

7. **This Week's lectionary readings**

Acts 2:42-47: A description of the life of the early disciples as they shared in worship, hospitality and caring for one another.

Psalm 23: David's famous psalm of confidence and hope in God's care, guidance and provision.

1 Peter 2:19-25: Peter encourages the believers who are going through trials because of their faith, and reminds them that Christ, who suffered though he was innocent, is the example we follow.

John 10:1-10: Jesus warns about those who are thieves and robbers, who do not care for 'the sheep', and he speaks of himself as the gate for the sheep, through which the sheep move to find pasture – and the abundant life that Jesus offers.

When earth casts us out, heaven waits to receive us

Welcome This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship Psalm of the week-Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

Word Read Acts 7:55-60 as a group.

1. Read these notes on the passage.

The work of the Spirit in the proto-martyr: — Note how explicitly the character, attainments, and triumph of Stephen are ascribed to the Holy Spirit. In the first notice of him he is called “a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost.” So here in his death. Bearing this in mind, observe —

- He looked up steadfastly into heaven.
- As he looked he saw the glory of God.
- In full harmony with these views he said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”.
- How was he exercised towards his enemies? He prayed, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.

One of the biggest questions we must face as followers of Christ is that of how our faith interacts with the crises in our world, and our engagement with them. It can be tough to walk the line between faith as an escape that makes us feel safe by “protecting” us from the world’s problems, and faith as little more than a framework for directing our own efforts to fix things. The third way – that of participating in God’s saving work while simultaneously trusting God for the outcome in our lives and world – is not always easy to live. But it is the challenge we are given this week through the Scriptures.

Stephen remains an important figure in the history of the church, as a quick survey of the reception history of several key points in Acts 7:55-60 demonstrates.

Stephen’s Outlook

1. Its expectancy.

‘He looked.’ He was now in search of help in his extremity; it was nowhere to be found in that neighbourhood. He looked off from everything earthly, sent his mind backward after some old promise, forward for some fresh revealing of hope, and upward

beyond all pain and worry for himself or the young Church he loved.

2. Its intelligence.

‘He looked up.’ He might have, in some way, sought help from the Roman government, or sympathy from his fellow-believers, but “up” was the only way in which to look, for one who had read the Old Testament as he had (Isaiah 31:1). So we must rest for living help, and for dying grace, upon Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:2).

3. Its tranquillity.

‘He looked up steadfastly.’ There is here no quailing of the coward, no cringing of the captive, no weak sympathy for those who would mourn his death. Is it not strange that the one person in all the world who would fitly express his exact feelings was at the time standing? (Acts 20:24). And any sincere believer may depend upon his covenant keeping God to give him perfect peace in dying, even under the most dreadful circumstances.

4. Its triumph.

‘Into heaven.’ True faith, eminent and dauntless, has an eyesight of its own, which will prove gloriously serviceable at the final moment of life.

In contrast with these false witnesses, the true witness is “full of the Holy Spirit” ...he saw the Son of Man in his glory and prayed for his accusers.

However, in this we notice not only the contrast between Stephen and his accusers, it is also impossible not to notice the similarities between Stephen and the One he is bearing witness to. Stephen does not only bear witness to Christ in what he said but also bears witness to him in the way he dies. Just as Jesus cried out “Father into your hands I commend my Spirit”, so Stephen cries: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage.

- a. He looked up steadfastly into heaven, where his heart and treasure had long been. Where else could he look?
- b. As he looked he saw the glory of God. Quickly read Isaiah 6:1-7 and say what the meaning of this glory is.
- c. In light of the theme, When earth casts us out, heaven waits to receive us, what do you think went through Stephen’s head and heart when He prayed, Lord, do not hold this sin against them?

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a) Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point of the sermon?
- b) Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Radical Discipleship Questions

- Stephen confessed Christ before those who crucified him. Who in our communities do we need to hear our confession of Christ?
- Which challenges do we think we would face and how are we going to past them?

5. Reflection questions

The Jews stoned Stephen to death, they refuse to hear his sermon that has been directed toward them and their murder of the Messiah Jesus.

- How does the death of Stephen encourage us to stand for truth and righteousness?
- Do you see any similarities between the death of Stephen and the death of Jesus?
- How is our time similar to Jesus and Stephen's time?

6. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to pray for... Fellowship in Trinity.

New ways for members to connect with each other. A sense of wholeness from being part of Trinity Methodist Church. Kindness and joy shared amongst us.

7. This Week's lectionary readings

Acts 7:55-60: Stephen who has been on trial, expresses his vision of Jesus glorified, which angers the religious leaders, who drag him out of the city to stone him. But, Stephen, as he dies, prays for his attackers, and commits himself to God.

Psalms 31:1-5, 15-16: The Psalmist (David, according to the heading) pleads for God's protection and deliverance from enemies who seek to harm and ensnare him, and commits his soul into God's care.

1 Peter 2:2-10: Christ, who was rejected by people, but honoured by God, is the cornerstone on which God is building a spiritual temple in which followers of Christ are the stones. This community that built on Christ is called out of darkness into God's light to be God's holy nation.

John 14:1-14: Jesus encourages his disciples to trust in him and not be troubled, for he is the way to God and God is revealed and known in him.

Sunday 14 May

**In Him we live, and move, and have our being,
as certain also of your own poets have said,
for we also are His offspring**

Welcome This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship Psalm of the week – Psalm 66:8-20

Word Read Acts 17:22-31 as a group.

1. Read these notes on the passage.

This week flows beautifully – and challengingly – from last week. The assurance that was explored through the readings in Easter 5A is found this week in the promise of God’s presence. In the light of the huge struggles we face in the world today, it can be tough to speak about God’s presence, especially when we seek to affirm God’s presence with those who suffer. But, the readings all call us to embrace the reality that God is with us even in the dark times, and that it is in God that we all “live, move and have our being” – whoever we may be.

Following from last week’s word of assurance, the Lectionary continues in an attitude of comfort, emphasising God’s nearness and God’s strengthening of those who struggle. In Athens Paul speaks to the people of the city about a God who can be known and “in whom we live, move and have our being.” He invites them to recognise that God is very near to all people whether they are aware of God or not. The Psalmist reflects on God’s presence even during times of ‘testing’ and gives thanks for God’s rescue and forgiveness, and celebrates that God does indeed hear the prayers of God’s people. In Peter’s letter the apostle continues to offer comfort to a persecuted church assuring them that they are following in Christ’s nail-scarred footsteps, and that in Christ they are saved. And, in John’s Gospel, Jesus offers the promise of the Spirit, assuring his disciples that by the Spirit they will always know that God is with them and in them, and they will enjoy the love relationship that Jesus has given them. The

wonderful, challenging and comforting message of this week is that God is intimately available to us, and that God's presence and resources are accessible to us as we face the challenges and struggles of following Christ and living fully. The inevitable question this rises is whether we are willing to embrace God's presence, and rest in God's strength even as we wrestle with injustice and the big crises facing our world.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage.

- a. St Paul was not one of the twelve apostles. Describe St Paul's apostleship?
- b. Why was it important for Paul to address the people of Athens?
- c. What sins did the Athenians have to repent from?

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a) Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point of the sermon?
- b) Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Radical Discipleship Questions

- One of the applications which the St Paul makes of his subject is to repentance, which was never contemplated by the ancient religions. Where do you and the Church need to repent?
- Jesus and the resurrection. There is only one way of returning to God, and that through Him who is an image of the invisible God, who was dead and is alive again. Is Jesus your way of returning to God. Is his resurrection your power for daily living?

5. Reflection questions

What would you think of God if someone came into your life, watched you from afar for weeks, listened well, felt their way into your struggles and hopes, walked beside you through your daily tasks, learned the language of your life, and then presented God to you using the words and images of your own life. Would you be able to see God's relationship with you as clearly as if someone had just wiped the fog from the glass of your bathroom mirror?

6. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to pray for.... Fellowship in Trinity.

New ways for members to connect with each other. A sense of wholeness from being part of Trinity Methodist Church. Kindness and joy shared amongst us.

7. This Week's lectionary readings

Acts 17:22-31: Paul preaches to the people of Athens, remarking on their many shrines, and using the shrine to the unknown god as a springboard, tells them about the God who is near to every person, and who has revealed God's self to humanity in Jesus.

Psalm 66:8-20: A psalm of praise to God for testing God's people, rescuing them and forgiving them.

1 Peter 3:13-22: Peter encourages the believers to endure suffering for doing good as Christ did, and to remember that they are saved in Christ, who is now in a place of honour and authority with God.

John 14:15-21: Jesus invites his disciples to show their love for him by obeying him, and he promises that the Holy Spirit will come to them and be in them, leading them into all truth.

**In the midst of the gulf which separated God and man,
and in the midst of the tide of time stood Jesus —
on Him rests the Old Dispensation and the New.**

Welcome This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship Psalm of the week – Psalm 47

Word Read Acts 1:1-11 as a group.

1. Read these notes on the passage.

The Ascension is one of those significant days in the Liturgical Calendar that is also really difficult. There is so much meaning, so many ways of approaching the readings, and yet so many questions that can potentially bog the day down in controversy, theological debate or heavy academic discourse. Yet it remains a day of celebration and an invitation to deeper encounter with God.

Reflections on the Theme

If the Ascension has led us to faith in a disembodied, removed God who is watching us “from a distance”, we have missed its message. Whatever the disciples actually saw happen that day, the facts of the experience are far less important than the meaning. The Ascension certainly does not mean that heaven is “up”, hell is “down”, and God is looking down on us from some far removed place. Rather, the Ascension offers us a number of crucial truths that, in this world of injustice and inequality, we desperately need to reclaim.

- First the fact that Jesus did not die, but was seen to “return” to the Godhead physically is a continuation of the story of incarnation. God does not despise the human body – rather God embraces it, inhabits it and glorifies it, making human flesh part of the Godhead! This means that the needs of the body – for food, clean water, sanitation, shelter, and loving, intimate touch – are all part of the Gospel and are included in God’s gift of salvation.

- Secondly, the Ascension declares as clearly and loudly as can be that Jesus, and not Caesar (nor any other Empire, government, system or social hierarchy) is Lord over all. This means that our ultimate allegiance must be to Christ first, and that our lives are called to be a reflection of Christ's reign in the midst of the other forces and 'lords' that influence and control our world.
- Finally, the Ascension always comes with the promise of the Holy Spirit's power which tells us that God is not absent and removed from us, but continues to be completely immersed in the world and in the lives of human beings. The gift of the Spirit also assures us of God's resources and God's inspiration and God's guidance to strengthen and enable us as we seek to live as faithful followers of Christ. It may be tempting to make this celebration about Christian triumphalism, but that would be to deny the meaning of Christ's earthly life. Rather, the Ascension is the necessary next step in that life, ensuring that God remains involved with human beings, that God's presence continues to be available to us, and that we know that everything that makes us human – including our physicality – has been embraced and welcomed into God. It's less about "Christianity" defeating all, and more about Christ drawing all things into the life of God.

Connecting with Life:

1. We cannot celebrate Christ's Ascension and view power in the militant terms of domination.
2. We cannot celebrate the Ascension and believe that the Christ who is now 'Lord of all' is only concerned for some and not for others, only includes and welcomes some and not others.
3. We cannot celebrate the Ascension and abuse or idolise the body or its sexuality – our own or that of others. No, when we celebrate the Ascension, we affirm our belief that God is committed to humanity – including our physicality – to equality, to justice and to compassionate inclusion of all. And if we believe that Christ really is Lord of all, we cannot help but express this through living our lives according to the gracious, embodied, just and compassionate values of Christ's reign.

This means that, as church, the Ascension calls us to be a community of liberation not condemnation, of celebration not judgment, of this-worldly concern and compassion not other-worldly.

2. For Reflection

I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy.” John 16:20. Reflect, today, upon these words of Jesus. Know that Jesus was not only speaking just to them, but also to you. Do not be scandalized or shocked when life deals you some difficulty. Do not despair when suffering is placed before you. Surrender all things to our Lord and let Him transform it into the joy that He promises in the end.

- In what ways can you express some of these realities in your Ascension Day worship?

3. Close in Prayer for Trinity

4. Ascension Day lectionary readings

Acts 1:1-11: Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples. Then he is taken up into heaven, with the assurance of the angels that he will return.

Psalms 47: A celebration of and call to praise the God who is high over all.

Ephesians 1:15-23: Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians that they may know the power of Christ who is over all and fills all.

Luke 24:44-53: Jesus reminds the disciples of how he has fulfilled the Scriptures, then he promises the Holy Spirit, blesses them and is taken up to heaven.

A model prayer-meeting

Welcome This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship Psalm of the week- Psalm 68:1-10,32-35

Word Read Acts 1:6-14 as a group.

1. Read these notes on the passage.

Ascension-tide and the Second Advent are closely connected in many points. The moment Jesus had gone, the minds of the apostles were to be fixed on His return. He was then to them what He has been to Christians in all ages. We stand at the threshold of the Second Advent, as they did at that of the Ascension. Our curiosity in religious things often centres on it. And of it Jesus answers just as He did to the apostles (Matthew 24:36). The fact is certain, the time is concealed from us.

In the Upper Room

‘Upper’ does not mean a room above the lower floor, much less a garret or inferior apartment, but one comparatively spacious — reserved in Greek and Jewish houses for the use of guests, or for unusual occasions. “Upper rooms were a kind of domestic chapels in every house. There they assembled to read the law, and to transact religious affairs. In returning to Jerusalem the disciples showed — They were commanded to wait, but not to be idle; and their business was prayer for that Spirit who was to fit them for their work. They came from this retirement, to live in the view of a world, eyed by enemies as the butt of persecution, and by friends as examples and guides. Not the least of the blessings which resulted from these days of prayer was the lesson given to public men to prepare for great doings by secret devotions.

The Meeting for Prayer Preparatory to the Day of Pentecost: —

This passage refers to the most interesting period in the history of the Church, the results of which will be felt to all eternity. In one point of view the infant Church was in a bereaved condition. Still their glorified Lord had given to them words of promise which inspired them with the confident expectation of coming glory. And never was there a more interesting congregation. No Jewish ruler, no Rabbi, no Roman

senator was there. It was a select and happy group of holy men and women, who had met for the most important purpose, to agonise in prayer. They were not acting under a momentary impulse; nor as the result of a transient excitement, but under the influence of that deep personal piety that needs no other impulse but what is supplied by a sense of duty, or by its own spontaneous energy.

It was:

1. A time of transition.
2. A time of felt need.
3. A time of expectancy
4. A time of fraternal conference
5. A time of prayer

A model prayer-meeting: — If the prayer-meeting is the thermometer of the Church, then the first Christian prayer-meeting registers a high degree of spiritual life existing just after the departure of Christ. This was a model in point of —

1. Attendance — There were one hundred and twenty present.
2. The Spirit — Peace and unity prevailed. The day of “murmuring” had not yet come. Union is strength. A divided Church cannot long remain a praying Church. God answers prayer when it is offered by few or many ‘with one accord’. The promise is addressed to those who are ‘agreed’.
3. The Results — The Church was born at a prayer meeting, which should encourage us to sustain our often thinly attended and cold spirited prayer-meetings. The prayer-meeting is more than the thermometer of the Church, it is the source of her spiritual power. There is as intimate a relation between the prayer-meeting and the outpouring of the Spirit as between the gathering of the cloud and the downpour of the shower. Pentecostal revivals must be preceded by ante-Pentecostal prayer meetings.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage.

- a. Do you think the disciples understood why Jesus ascended to the heavens?
- b. What is the reason they stood staring into heaven?

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a) Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point of the sermon?
- b) Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. **Radical Discipleship Questions**

- What for us is more important than seeking the kingdom of God?
- What have we not done, which the early disciples did as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit?
- How are we to show obedience to Christ and fearless faith?

5. **For Reflection**

It is all too easy to get distracted by the immediate issues. There are still bills to pay and mouths to feed even if God has called us to a global cause.

We have to keep a balance between the pull of the world and the call of the Spirit- without compromising. The key to this balancing act is in constant prayer. Like the disciples we have to set aside special times of prayer as well as learning to pray in the daily routines and challenges of life.

6. **Close in Prayer for Trinity**

This week we ask you to pray for... The Youth Portfolio.

Pray for all youth leaders as they learn, grow and serve Friday night and Sunday morning programmes for teens, Seekers Confirmation course. For more young people to turn and return to Jesus.

7. **This Week's lectionary readings**

Acts 1:6-14: The disciples question Jesus about the timing of God's restoration of Israel, but Jesus promises the Holy Spirit and then ascends into heaven as they watch. Then two white-robed men tell them that Jesus will return in the same way they saw him leave.

Psalms 68:1-10, 32-35: A psalm of victory and praise, celebrating God's might in military terms, and rejoicing in God's protection of the weak and vulnerable, and in God's provision of a home for God's people.

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11: Peter encourages the persecuted believers, reminding them that they have witnessed Christ's suffering and share in it, and that they have the hope of seeing Christ's glory, and sharing in that as well.

John 17:1-11: Jesus prays for himself that God will take him back into the glory he shared with the Father. Then he prays for his disciples, who have received Christ's message and have believed and given him glory, that they may be protected by God's name and may be one as Christ and the Father are one.

The effects produced upon the day of Pentecost.

Welcome This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship Psalm of the week – Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

Word Read Acts 2:1-21 as a group.

1. Read these notes on the passage.

Sometimes it feels like the celebration of Pentecost has become an exercise in missing the point. What was a radical, communal, inclusive and world-shifting event has become, in much contemporary practice, and individualist, exclusive, status-quo sustaining experience with little more to commend it than a sense of euphoria. If only we could recapture some of the Church-birthing impact of this significant day, both the Church and the world around it would, like the Pentecost spectators, be amazed by what God is doing among us.

The Day of Pentecost is a celebration that is rich and challenging for followers of Christ, but it is easy to miss the transformative call that it offers. The readings for this year bring together a number of different themes, that all combine to beckon us into a deeper encounter with God and God’s reign and into a life of Christ-like service. In Acts God’s Spirit is given as the empowerment for God’s people to become prophetic proclaimers of God’s goodness – as Peter indicates through the connection with the Joel prophecy. The Pentecost narrative also contains echoes of the experience of Moses and the leaders he appoints to serve God’s people, and Moses’ longing that all of God’s people should be filled with God’s Spirit and proclaim God’s message. The Psalmist recognises that it is God’s breath that sustains all creation and that the only appropriate response is to offer his life in praise of God. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul teaches that God’s Spirit is given to all and empowers all so that all of God’s people may serve one another. In John’s Gospel this calling is opened even further as Jesus, in his gift of the Spirit to the disciples, informs them that they are now sent as he was sent – and he was sent to bring living water to all who would come to him.

Pentecost, then, is not a moment of personal bliss, or simply an experience that can be enjoyed in some sort of euphoria. Rather, it is

a moment which changes everything, in which our lives are equipped and marked for God's reign, and in which our quest to follow Christ is made possible through the gift of the Spirit. The evidence of a Pentecost Church, then, is not so much particular gifts or experiences, but the life, grace and service that the Church brings to the world. We are filled with the Spirit not for our own sakes, but for the sake of the world that God loves so dearly.

The gift of Pentecost is the inspiration and empowerment we need to become those who, like Christ, seek to empower others. The Pentecost Spirit drives us back into the world to engage it and serve it. All it needs now is people who, by God's Spirit, have the divine will to make it happen.

In every community, every neighbourhood and every church God's Spirit seeks to enable people to "speak one another's languages", to welcome and serve one another, and to work together to serve and empower those who most need help and compassion. Rather than "lifting us up" above others into a group that is somehow favoured by God, Pentecost "pulls us down" to connect with those that we would never naturally have the strength or inclination to relate to. Rather than leading us out of the world, Pentecost drives us back into it to proclaim and live the prophetic message of God's reign, as Christ did.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage.

- a. How important was the day of Pentecost for the disciples?
- b. How relevant was the day of Pentecost for those who hadn't received the news of Jesus?

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a) Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point of the sermon?
- b) Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Radical Discipleship Questions

What new message has the day of Pentecost laid in your heart?
Who will you share this message with?

5. Reflection questions

- In what ways is your church community tempted to separate itself from the world around it?

- In what ways do you sense the Spirit driving you out to proclaim God's grace and glory to those who are different from you?
- In what ways are you being equipped and called by the Spirit to bring people together and to serve those who need to experience God's presence and activity through human hands?

6. **Close in Prayer for Trinity**

This week we ask you to pray for... The Youth Portfolio.

Pray for all youth leaders as they learn, grow and serve Friday night and Sunday morning programmes for teens, Seekers Confirmation course. For more young people to turn and return to Jesus.

7. **This Week's lectionary readings**

Acts 2:1-21: The believers are filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and they start to praise God in various languages.

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b: The world and all its creatures depend on God for provision and breath – which leads the Psalmist to commit to praise God.

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13: No one can acknowledge Jesus' lordship without God's Spirit, and God's Spirit, given to all of God's people, gives different gifts to each person for the good of all.

John 20:19-23: Jesus appears to the disciples in the Upper Room and commissions them, breathing on them and giving them his Spirit, and instructing them that they are sent as he was sent.

**God is the source of grace, love, and community –
God's commitment to us.**

Welcome This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship Psalm of the week – Psalm 8

Word Read 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 as a group.

1. Read these notes on the passage.

The doctrine of the Trinity can, at times, feel like an awkward and embarrassing Christian belief. It is also, almost certainly, a deeply misunderstood one. For this reason, Trinity Sunday may well be one of the days in the year where we are tempted to depart from the Lectionary and focus our meditations elsewhere. If, however, we can resist all these temptations, and embrace the mystery and majesty of this day, the worship we enjoy, springing from our reflections on our Trinitarian God, can be deep, transforming and deeply inspiring.

This year the focus of Trinity Sunday is on two complementary themes. In the first, we are called to recognise and open ourselves to the work of the Triune God in creation – in the act of creating, in revealing God's self to humanity, and in empowering humanity to participate with God in the care of the universe. Both the Genesis reading and the Psalm reflect this theme. In the second theme we are called to recognise the uniting, community-creating work of the God who is, within God's self, a Triune community. Paul's letter to the Corinthians speaks of the unity of the church and of the Trinity's gifts to bring us together and in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus calls his followers to bring others into the community of faith, giving them a place of belonging through the act of baptism in the name of the Triune God. Both themes – God's work in creation, and God's work in community – lead us to a recognition of the connectedness of all things, and of God's presence and life in all things. God is always creating and always connecting (or revealing the connections that are always there), and so we are called to participate in God's work by participating in God's community and bringing others – including all of creation – into the gracious, growing, interconnected, life-sharing, just and creative communion of the Trinity.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage.

- a. 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 asks us to reflect grace, love and communion of God in our lived experience and to be the people of peace. How is the Trinity- God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit a perfect model of living in grace, love and in peace?

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a) Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point of the sermon?
- b) Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Radical Discipleship Questions

The doctrine of the Trinity makes no sense and serves no purpose if we treat it as abstract dogma. It becomes necessary and helpful only because it stems from believers' first acknowledging that God has acted in various ways—especially through Jesus Christ and through the presence of God's indwelling Spirit.

5. Reflection questions

1. In what ways have we fallen into patterns of defining ourselves by our divisions and disconnectedness?
2. In what specific ways can we seek to contribute to God's connecting work and take our place in God's global community while always seeking to make welcoming space for others – especially those with whom we struggle to connect?
3. What might it mean if we begin to identify ourselves by our connectedness, rather than our difference or disconnection?
4. What might ministry become if we were motivated and guided by the ways we are connected to those we are trying to reach, rather than focusing on how 'they' are different from 'us'?

6. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to pray for....Holy Spirit Weekend
Pray for the Holy Spirit to move in our community. For many people to attend the Holy Spirit weekend. For the leaders and organizers of the weekend as they prepare.

7. **This Week's lectionary readings**

Genesis 1:1-2:4a: The account of the creation of heaven and earth, in which God speaks the creative Word and the Spirit hovers over creation.

Psalm 8: The Psalmist ponders how the great God who created all things nevertheless cares for human beings and gives men and women a place of stewardship over creation.

2 Corinthians 13:11-13: Paul closes his letter to the Corinthian church with the famous benediction invoking Christ's grace, God's love and the Spirit's presence.

Matthew 28:16-20: Jesus commissions his disciples to serve the nations and to baptise them in the name of the Triune God

Extra Resources

If you would like to ‘read up’ to help you in your study, or to help you prepare for the Home Group discussion, then here are some resources you could look at:

- <http://www.textweek.com/yeara/yeara.htm>
- (this is a central resource that takes you to many resources for preachers, worship leaders, Bible Study leaders, individual study)
- <https://sacredise.com/year-a/> (This is a South African Methodist Minister, Rev. John VD Laar, who has a brief commentary and hymn and worship song suggestions)
- The following are links that use the very helpful Open and Relational, or Process Theology Perspective:
 - [Year A, 2022-2023 – Process & Faith \(processandfaith.org\)](http://processandfaith.org)
 - [Transfigurations \(wordpress.com\)](http://transfigurations.wordpress.com)
 - [Living A Holy Adventure - Bruce Epperly \(patheos.com\)](http://patheos.com)
- [Lectionary Resources \(billloader.com\)](http://billloader.com) (This is Prof. William Loader’s excellent and up to date Biblical Studies Perspective)
- [Revised Common Lectionary \(vanderbilt.edu\)](http://vanderbilt.edu)
(This is a beautiful space for those who want to view art that is linked to the lectionary.)
- Purchase the ‘Disciplines’ book of Daily Devotions for 2023 (available in our Church Office while stocks last)
- Resurrection Love (Trevor Hudson)