

Memorial Day / Ascension Day
7th Sunday of Easter

Light Christ candle in your home and remember those brave heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice by laying down their lives to preserve the freedoms we enjoy.

Opening Prayer:

Welcome, body of Christ as we come today to praise the risen Lord. In our praise may we be changed that we might ourselves become the presence of the risen Lord to the world. Amen.

The tradition of wearing red poppies to honor the war dead started with Lt. Col. John McCrae's poem in which he describes red poppies blowing in the fields of France and Belgium where soldiers died during WWI battles.

In Flanders Fields

by: Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, MD
(1872-1918)

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

Sing or read aloud: "God of the Ages" UMH #698

1. God of the ages, whose almighty hand
leads forth in beauty all the starry band
of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
our grateful songs before thy throne arise.
2. Thy love divine hath led us in the past;
in this free land with thee our lot is cast;
be thou our ruler, guardian, guide, and stay,
thy Word our law, thy paths our chosen way.
3. From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence,
be thy strong arm our ever sure defense;
thy true religion in our hearts increase;
thy bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.
4. Refresh thy people on their toilsome way;
lead us from night to never-ending day;
fill all our lives with love and grace divine,
and glory, laud, and praise be ever thine.

Offertory Prayer:

On this day (May 24) when John Wesley's heart was "strangely warmed" may our hearts warm with joy as we share our tithes and offerings to help others.

Scripture: The Risen Christ with His Disciples
Acts 1: 1-11 Ascension Day

Introduction to Scripture:

Theophilus means "lover of God" or "God fearer". Since the author refers to an earlier book, the Gospel of Luke, we can assume that the process of organizing the authoritative materials - the process being call "canonization" had already begun even at this very early stage in the church's history. The Book of Acts continues the drama of Jesus' work.

1 Theophilus, the first scroll I wrote concerned everything Jesus did and taught from the beginning, 2 right up to the day when he was taken up into heaven. Before he was taken up, working in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus instructed the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed them that he was alive with many convincing proofs. He appeared to them over a period of forty days, speaking to them about God's kingdom. 4 While they were eating together, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. He said, "This is what you heard from me: 5 John baptized with water, but in only a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." 6 As a result, those who had gathered together asked Jesus, "Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?" 7 Jesus replied, "It isn't for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 Rather, 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 end of the earth.” 9 After Jesus said these things, as they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going away and as they were staring toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood next to them. 11 They said, “Galileans, why are you standing here, looking toward heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you saw him go into heaven.”

CEB

May the Lord bless the hearing and reading of this scripture today. Amen.

Message: “Ascended into Heaven” Pastor Heather

At Rown tree Memorial United Church of Canada, where I attended as a child, the poem “In Flanders Fields” was read every Memorial Day Sunday. Usually it was read by my mother - a command sergeant major in the Canadian Women’s Army Corps during WWII. As we enjoy this Memorial Day holiday, it’s important to remember the men and women who gave their lives to protect the freedoms that benefit us all.

During this “Stay at Home” time, I’ve been spending more time looking at different scriptures that I would not usually choose as my preaching text. Today is another one of those messages, focusing on a relatively obscure Christian Holiday of which many are unaware: Ascension Sunday. If you have a Roman Catholic background you may recall a priest saying a special mass that day. This year it is being celebrated in the church calendar on Memorial Day. Part of the reason, I chose it for my sermon this week is due to a call I received from Kelly Garcia about 2 weeks ago. She told me her upcoming surgery was scheduled for May 21 and she knew in her heart everything would go well because that was Ascension Day. I was amazed she knew the significance of that calendar date and wondered how many others in our congregation realized that was the day Jesus ascended back to His father in heaven

It was 40 days after the resurrection, after walking, talking and breaking bread with some of His followers, Jesus ascended to heaven.

In all honesty, the ascension is a rather difficult idea for the modern mind to handle. It’s the story of how Jesus went to the Mount of Olives after His resurrection from the dead. There, according to the Book of Acts, Jesus literally flew off into heaven. Acts 1: 9 . . .”as they were watching, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight.”

In the 1st century, the understanding of the cosmos was very different from ours. People understood heaven to be a place that was literally, geographically “up” from the earth. I remember last September when my grandson Darwin, 9 years of age, flew for the 1st time. He was going to Hawaii for his uncle Erik’s wedding. He was fascinated that the airplane went above the clouds and asked me “How far above where airplanes fly is heaven?”

The persons in Jesus’ time could visualize Him going “up” into heaven. With our scientific view

of the cosmos, we know there is no “up” or “down” in the universe. Even our notion of heaven is not of a geographical location or direction. When contemporary people think of the ascension, it is a little hard to imagine the Lord Jesus Christ flying off like a one person space shuttle into the skies!

Yet, despite our scientific reservations, the story of the ascension is spiritually important to us. The ascension was the church’s way of dealing with a fundamental fact. The earliest disciples had experienced the bodily presence of a risen Lord, the one who was not under the claim of death. After a passage of time, this experience of the risen Lord as bodily present with them seemed to pass. Jesus didn’t appear again. They accounted for His absence by saying that the risen Lord was now in heaven. They had to go forward without His physical presence. He had ascended into heaven.

Christians today live in the same circumstance. We believe in a risen Lord who is not here any longer, except in the church as the body of Christ. So on Ascension Sunday, we think about What Jesus’ physical absence means for Christians today.

If the church is the body of Christ, then we are called to give to the church the devotion and respect that Christ deserves. Think about it. How precious to you is the church? - not the building - but the people who connect with the life and mission of the church. How central is your life to the mission of the church? Sometimes we treat the church like it is just one more volunteer community organization. It is so much more than a civic club, health related charity or an organization that supports our schools. None of these, although they do good work are the body of Christ. Only the church is Jesus among us - Its mission is to be consistent with Jesus’ mission. The love we have for it is the love we have for Jesus.

The church - the gathering of believers together - is the closest we will ever come to having Jesus to care for and to love. On Ascension Sunday, we are called to reassess our devotion to the church as the body of Christ still among us. The risen Lord is not here; He has ascended. The body of Christ is very much here, and the way we treat the church is the way we treat the risen Lord.

Ascension Sunday also reminds us that if Christ’s work is to continue, it is up to us to do it. Now that is not to say we receive no godly help. Next Sunday is Pentecost, and we will celebrate our empowerment by the Holy Spirit. This divine help comes to empower us to do the work of Christ. Jesus is no longer here to heal the sick. He is no longer here to touch the outcast. He is no longer here to feed the hungry. It is up to us, the body of Christ to continue this work. If the church fails to be the body of Christ, Jesus is absent. If the church fails to be the body of Christ, Jesus is nowhere to be seen.

During this pandemic, I’ve been encouraged by the creative ways our church family has stepped outside our limited budget, to help those both inside our immediate congregation and those with the connection through our missional outreach groups. Both our Sunday church school classes

and Amy Davis have co-ordinated bringing food and other necessities to families who are struggling. The UMW is helping with food for a funeral dinner for a JAVA family as well as those within our congregation who have had loved ones die. Together we are finding new ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus and follow our mission “To make new disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the World” and our vision:

- Connecting to the community
- Creating Disciples of Jesus Christ
- Celebrating with worship, prayer and praise in new ways!

God is continuing to bless us as we learn new ways to be the church in our community and beyond.

So today as we remember and honor our fallen on Memorial Day weekend, let us also remember the ascension of Jesus. His ascension invites us to relate to the church as we would to Christ. It reminds each of us of the critical nature of our role in the body of Christ. It calls us to take up Jesus’ work on earth during these challenging times as we serve a risen Savior.

Amen

Sing or read aloud: “He Lives” UMH #310

1. I serve a risen Savior, he’s in the world today;
I know that he is living, whatever foes may say,
I see his hand of mercy, I hear his voice of cheer,
and just the time I need him, he’s always near.

Refrain:

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
(He lives) (He lives)

He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way.

He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
(He lives) (He lives)

You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.

2. In all the world around me I see his loving care,
and though my heart grows weary, I never will despair,
I know that he is leading through all the stormy blast;
the day of his appearing will come at last.

Refrain:

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
(He lives) (He lives)

He walks with me and talks with me along life’s narrow way.

He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
(He lives) (He lives)
You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.

3. Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, lift up your voice and sing
eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the King!
The hope of all who seek him, the help of all who find;
none other is so loving, so good and kind.

Refrain:

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
(He lives) (He lives)
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
(He lives) (He lives)
You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart.

Closing Blessing:

May Christ so dwell in you that through your lives Christ might continue to be present and transforming in today's world.