



CONNECT

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I will put my hope in God,
and once again I will praise him.
My Saviour and my God.

Psalm 42 : 11

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Dear Friends,

As we confess in the Apostle's Creed we believe that after Jesus rose from the dead, he did not die a second time. Instead, 40 days after his resurrection, Jesus left the Earth by being taken up, body and soul, to Heaven to re-join God the Father. This event is called the ascension (it falls on 21 May this year), and it was witnessed by Jesus' eleven remaining apostles.

Now it came to pass, while he blessed them, that he was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Luke 24:51-52

The idea that Jesus ascended to God "up there" is just as strange as Harold Camping's image of corpses flying up to the sky along with today's believers. As a fundamentalist evangelist, though passed away some years ago, I am sure, he would have seen coronavirus as the beginning of the end times. I think differently. I think it is a sign for us to be kinder and more supportive towards each other, and a wake up call for the world that science should take priority over politics, not the other way round. Some Christians still live in a three-story universe: heaven above, earth between, hell below, but few people believe that if you get into a space ship and fly far enough, you'll find a place called "heaven."

Of course, it's not out of the question that Jesus defied gravity, but is that the real point? I don't think so. Ascension is more about spirituality than gravity. The disciples asked about the restoration of Israel on the day of the Ascension. Jesus' response is purposely vague, and still remains good counsel for those who seek a precise date for judgement day or the fulfilment of history. *"It is not for you to know the times or periods."* Rather, we are to await the coming of God's Spirit and his power that comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit, be it in the 1st or 21st centuries.

Finished with his counsel, Jesus is lifted up, and the disciples are left gazing into the heavens until an angel admonishes, *"Why do you stand looking toward heaven?"* The angel promises Jesus' ultimate return, but it cannot

make us lazy stargazers. Not even during the time of coronavirus lockdown! We have a lot of work to do here on earth and how much more work will have to be done when the lockdown restrictions are lifted to catch up with things!

I think the main point of Ascension is getting a perspective. Rising to the clouds gives us a broader perspective on our lives and the planet. Let us rise above the clouds and problems that coronavirus, social distancing, disruptions to private and church lives have caused for us and see life differently. We should appreciate what we've got and each other more. Value food, clothes, clean water, shelter, medical care, freedom of movement and speech, freedom of religion, as it is not long when the lockdown will be over and life cannot be the same again. Rather than individualistic images of salvation and personal well-being, Ascension challenges us to bring heaven to earth, that is, to live Jesus' values in our world. Maybe capitalism is finished as a way of life based on greed and exploitation. I wish. As the Lord's Prayer proclaims, *"Thy kingdom (or realm) come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* When we live from a higher perspective, we can transcend our own self-interest to embrace the well-being of our community and the whole earth, including strangers, our society and the whole world suffering from coronavirus and its dire consequences, furloughing masses, job losses, limited stock, price rises, churches struggling financially, exhaustion and fears of the caring and medical profession as they are overworked and still lack PPE.

Heaven is not up on the third floor of the universe, but it is where God is – everywhere. In the world. In the midst of this global pandemic. In our hearts. The ever-present God is right here, giving us all the guidance and inspiration we need, if we but look beyond ourselves. Our mission is to heal, to save lives and protect creation, to keep in touch and love each other. We don't need to wait for a far off day of perfection and rapture. If God is always with us, then right here and now can be the day of transformation and fulfilment.

God Bless John

Psalm 42 (Good News Translation)

The Prayer of Someone in Exile

- 1 As a deer longs for a stream of cool water,
so I long for you, O God.
- 2 I thirst for you, the living God.
When can I go and worship in your presence?
- 3 Day and night I cry, and tears are my only food;
all the time my enemies ask me,
“Where is your God?”
- 4 My heart breaks when I remember the past,
when I went with the crowds to the house of God
and led them as they walked along,
a happy crowd, singing and shouting praise to God.
- 5 Why am I so sad? Why am I so troubled?
I will put my hope in God,
and once again I will praise him, my Saviour and my God.
- 6 Here in exile my heart is breaking,
and so I turn my thoughts to him.
- 7 He has sent waves of sorrow over my soul;
chaos roars at me like a flood,
like waterfalls thundering down to the Jordan
from Mount Hermon and Mount Mizar.
- 8 May the Lord show his constant love during the day,
so that I may have a song at night, a prayer to the God of my life.
- 9 To God, my defender, I say,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go on suffering from the cruelty of my enemies?”
- 10 I am crushed by their insults,
as they keep on asking me, “Where is your God?”
- 11 Why am I so sad? Why am I so troubled?
I will put my hope in God, and once again I will praise him.
My Saviour and my God.

“Your Cancer Cafe, Nailsea”

This facility offers a mutually supportive group for anyone affected by cancer - (sufferers and carers) - providing a safe space for people to talk, if they wish to, with others in similar situations.

Useful Information is readily available, and complimentary therapies, well-being art and craft activities and refreshments are on offer for those wishing to participate.

Meetings take place on the third Thursday of each month from 2 - 5pm at 65, High Street, Nailsea.

Your contributions will be much appreciated by Jo Hopkinson (a cancer sufferer herself) who initiated the group, and she extends a warm welcome to anyone who feels they can benefit from this service.

Keeping Going

Ave has been strolling around Scotch Horn Park singing hymns such as Onward Christian Soldiers to keep her going.

Instead of going into the street at 8pm on Thursdays, Sally has been sending prayers of thanks to God for all NHS staff and all those others helping behind the scenes.

Please let us know what you have been doing

The URC daily devotions

The URC daily devotions can be accessed via devotions.urb.org.uk
These are approx 5 minutes long. The Sunday service can be accessed from the same site.

Commitment for Life Prayer

We pray for our partners in Commitment for Life,
for Bangladesh, for Zimbabwe, for Central America,
for Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
We remember the challenges which face them acutely,
but of which we are all part -
climate disruption, sustainability, security and wellbeing.
We pray for the many whose lives have been and are
being transformed through our acting, praying and giving.
We pray for the work of Christian Aid and Global Justice Now,
as they work alongside, and speak for, the world's poorest people.
Amen

This Month's Joke

The preacher's Sunday sermon was Forgive Your Enemies. Toward the end of the service, He asked his congregation, "How many of you have forgiven their enemies"?

About half held up their hands. He then repeated his question. As it was past lunchtime, this time about 80 percent held up their hands.

He then repeated his question again. All responded, except one small elderly lady.

"Mrs. Jones?" inquired the preacher, are you not willing to forgive your enemies?

"I don't have any." she replied. smiling sweetly.

"Mrs. Jones, that is very unusual. How old are you?" "Ninety-three," she replied.

"Oh Mrs. Jones, what a blessing and a lesson to us all you are. Would you please come down in front of this congregation and tell us all how a person can live ninety-three years and not have an enemy in the world."

The little sweetheart of a lady tottered down the aisle, faced the congregation, and said

"I outlived every single one of them."