



**Welcome to written worship for Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021,  
the seventh Sunday of Easter.**

This Sunday is transitional space...we find ourselves 'in between' the Ascension and Pentecost. As you settle yourself for worship, you might like to notice where in your life you find yourself 'in between' one thing and another. For many of us, the gradual lifting of Covid restrictions puts us in constant transition, but there may be other areas of life where you are making decisions about a way forward, or contemplating doing things differently.

However challenging the transitions we live through, these words remind us of the firm ground on which we stand...

Alleluia! The Lord reigns!  
Let the earth rejoice! Alleluia!

Hymn: Rejoice and be glad (H&P 207, MP 573) OR Joy to the world (H&P 77, StF 330, MP 393)

Let us pray...and for the last Sunday this year we pray the set prayers for the Easter Season from the Methodist Worship Book...

Let us pray.

Glory to you, O God:  
You raised Jesus from the grave,  
Bringing us victory over death  
And giving us eternal life.

Glory to you, O Christ: for us and for our salvation  
You overcame death  
And opened the gate to everlasting life.

Glory to you, O Holy Spirit:  
You lead us into the truth  
And breathe new life into us.

Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
now and forever.

**Amen**

If we have fallen into despair, Lord, forgive us.  
**Lord, forgive us.**

If we have failed to hope in you, Lord, forgive us.  
**Lord, forgive us.**

If we have been fearful of death, Lord, forgive us.  
**Lord, forgive us.**

If we have forgotten the victory of Christ, Lord, forgive us.  
**Lord, forgive us.**

*Silence*

May the living God  
raise us from despair,  
Give us victory over sin  
And set us free in Christ.  
**Amen**

Read: Acts 1: 1-26

*As you read, notice the ways in which the disciples are 'in between' one thing and another. Notice too how they work through the decision-making before them...*

Read: John 17:6-19

*This might feel a challenging passage to 'get your head round' – you may find that reading it aloud is helpful. Remember that this prayer is prayed by Jesus before his death, but is for the disciples as they return to the world after Jesus' dying and rising, as they move into the new life Jesus knows will come...*

*Know too, that where John speaks of 'the world', this is not the same as speaking of 'the earth'. For John, 'the world' is that which is not in tune with God's intention – not the whole of creation.*

*As you read, take time to notice whether any of this prayer is particularly for you today...*

We pray...Holy God, break your word among us as bread for our souls. Amen

Jesus says "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world..."

The disciples are waiting to be sent...to be sent out as Jesus' witnesses "in Jerusalem, in Judea and to the ends of the earth". They are waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit which will equip them for this work.

Jesus has ascended into heaven; the disciples have been challenged by two men in white robes (angels? Moses and Elijah?) – though I have to say that if I had been there I am sure that I too would have been gazing where Jesus had gone; they have returned to Jerusalem and to the upstairs room. They are all there, the eleven remaining disciples, some of the women, Jesus' brothers; they are devoting themselves to prayer.

Into this situation, Peter speaks...drawing on words from the psalms to articulate the need to appoint another into the company of disciples to serve as a witness to Jesus' resurrection.

As I have reflected this week I have been fascinated to read very different reflections on this situation from different commentators. Recognising that the chosen man, Matthias, is never heard of again in the biblical record, one commentator suggests that the disciples 'jumped the gun', that they did not wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit before making this critical decision, and somehow missed an opportunity to choose one who would have 'made his mark' on the mission to come. Others instead see the silence about Matthias, carefully chosen as he was, as proof that we can be called of God even if we do not make an apparently notable contribution. Still others notice the process of the decision-making, and in it see a pattern for the life of the Church. We will never know all there is to know about this situation and its impact on the life of the early Christian community...but I see hope here in so many ways.

What if Peter and the others did place organisation and structure – the right number of witnesses – over the discipline of waiting for the Holy Spirit? Still the good news of Jesus has spread to the ends of the earth! God works with what is, with what we are able to offer, with who and how we are – continually recreating. There is always hope...

What if Matthias worked tirelessly for the gospel, risking all as witness to Jesus' life, death and resurrection – and still did not make it into any part of our written record of the early Church? Still the good news of Jesus is spread to the ends of the earth, and I have no doubt that Matthias was loved to the uttermost by the God he served. Scripture's silence reminds us that our worth is not determined by what is noticed by others, but is found first in our identity as God's beloved, and then in our relationships with those we love in our turn. There is always hope...

What if the important thing here is not the outcome but the process? The way Peter approached the issue steeped in scripture, the way the community proposed names from their common wisdom, having decided what was needed of the candidates, the way they prayed and sought God's guidance, and the way they were obedient to the outcome... As Matthias and the others are transformed from disciples to apostles, the good news of Jesus is spread to the ends of the earth. There is hope in abundance.

This last, I think, is a process we can catch hold of. It weaves together an 'abiding' in God through a dwelling with scripture and a reliance on prayer, with a use of the skills of reason God sets within God's people, and a confidence to trust God with the outcome discerned by the community. This is a way we can work too.

Next week we will celebrate with Peter and the others as they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. But, for now, and even then, many of us remain in our own in between times. In between times, waiting times, are often hard. Sometimes we are afraid that we will do the wrong thing. Sometimes we find that the right thing still does not work out as we hope or expect. Sometimes we struggle to find a process which will enable us to be faithful in our discernment. And yet, in all of this, God is continually making all things new, and there is hope enough for all.

Hymn: Father, hear the prayer we offer (H&P 436, StF 518, MP 132)

And so, as we continue in prayer, we pray for those who are living through a transition of whatever kind...

*Loving God  
To you we trust our prayer*

We pray for those who are accompanying others in discerning a right way forward...

*Loving God  
To you we trust our prayer*

We pray for those who are waiting...

*Loving God  
To you we trust our prayer*

We pray for those who are particularly on our hearts and minds this day...

*Loving God  
To you we trust our prayer*

We say the Lord's Prayer in the version most comfortable for us...

Hymn: Come down, O Love divine (H&P 281, StF 372, MP 89)

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with us, those we love, those for whom we pray  
this day and every day  
Amen

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