

**Brian's Sermon Text at Brentwood Presbyterian Church
Ascension Sunday, May 24, 2020**

Lifted Up
(Ps 47 and Luke 24:36-52)



**Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,
and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah
is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,
and that repentance and forgiveness of sins
is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations,
beginning with Jerusalem."
(Luke 24:45-46)**

Word to Ponder = Proclaim

Congregational Wisdom = owning faith & belief, shout out, constantly preaching and occasionally using words, claim, silent witness/witness, being salt & light, having intention, declare the truth, courageous, state a truth, joy in God's magnificent grace, give thanks, speak truth, make known, enthusiastically share

We really don't know the detailed dynamics
of what happened that day.
There are multiple references to Jesus being lifted up
throughout the New Testament,
but only two accounts of the actual event,
both by the same author, Luke,
here at the end of his gospel and then at the beginning of Acts.

In the midst of our humility in relationship to what actually happened,
we can focus on the message and meaning
Luke was inspired to draw from that event.
That's summarized in our text this morning.
And it focuses on the privilege we have
to proclaim the results of what God was doing in Jesus,
the person sent/chosen to lift us all up
into a positive communal flourishing

as partners with God in finishing his vision
of an interdependent and mutually beneficial creation.

We are being lifted up with Jesus
to be partners with God in the ongoing work of salvation,
of freeing this world from the complex bondage
arising from our rebellion against that partnership.

To be in Christ is to be in this partnership.
That is the gift to be proclaimed.
God has given us all this dignity and worth,
this honour of co-cultivating the garden of creation.
That is who we have been lifted up to be.

So, why is it so hard to accept, appreciate, and live into this gift?
Because that's the reality for most of us.

We've been deeply formed,
in many cases by so-called Christian influences,
to think of ourselves in negative terms,
as depraved in the core of our beings,
as total screw-ups in everything we do,
as willing servants of Satan in spreading evil everywhere we go.
And all of those formative influences, as we have processed them,
at multiple levels of our beings,
lead us to think we are a problem that Jesus has to fix.

Here's another way to think about our essential beings.
What if we are potential that Jesus is honing?
What if we are a bundle of possibilities that Jesus is encouraging?
What if we are already lifted up into partnership with God
and all of this church stuff and its impact on our daily lives
is being used by the Holy Spirit to sow the seeds
of the gifts of repentance and forgiveness
in all of our circles of inspiration and influence?

I will only speak for myself,
but listening strengthens my hunch that others feel the same.
I have honed my abilities to put myself down into a fine art.
I need to hear and adhere to the proclamation
that God has given me the gift of repentance
by forgiving me.
In that divine act, that I make no claims to have understood,
other than to accept it in joy,
I am grasped and released
from the traumas that keep me down.

I am lifted up with Jesus Christ into partnership
in redeeming the whole of creation.

As we emerge from this pandemic, whatever new normals may be possible,
keeping our focus in this little band of the friends of Jesus
on our privilege to proclaim the desire of the Creator
for the well-being of the whole of creation
is to be celebrated with joy, rejoiced in with great enthusiasm.

And with our eyes and ears opened by the Holy Spirit
to that flow of God's activity throughout the scriptures,
we can see and hear with a new appreciation
the influence of "those who so dearly loved us into being."

That's a phrase from Fred Rogers acceptance speech
when he was given a life-time achievement Emmy Award.
It's the title and theme of our Music for Reflection this morning
that Ben has composed and Ben and Dan will play.
As you listen, think of those who have proclaimed, in multiple ways,
that you are being lifted up to your true dignity and worth
as a beloved partner with God in finishing off the beauty of creation.

My Notes

My Prayers



This morning's Prayers of the People

[mention Adele, Susan & Ron, Hans, Marlene & Ken,
Glo & Jack, AnnE & Joel, ...]

We pray for all those oppressed by low self-esteem.
Break through the gloom of being put down
and lift us up with your forgiveness and reconciliation.
Teach us more deeply this morning
that we are in Christ and lifted up with him
to partner with you in the restoration of your vision for your creation.

Many of our comfortable assumptions have been disrupted.
In the midst of that confusion, you invite us to reconsider things.
What really matters?
What gifts do I have?
How can I contribute them more faithfully, wisely, and effectively?
How can I keep in touch with you
as you energize a new flow of grace in and through me?
And how do I comprehend more deeply
that there is no 'me' without your 'we'?

Accept our gratitude for all those
who loved us into being.
Help us see in their treasured efforts in their earthen vessels
your Spirit at work proclaiming and processing your love.
And make us your vessels for that grace in all that we do.

Inspire our partnership with you as we sing again
those treasured words of your prayer:

[we sing Darryl Nixon's arrangement of *The Lord's Prayer*]