

**Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking: [Video Service for May 24/20](#)**

An audio file of this week's reflection is on the church website: <https://charleswoodunited.org/media/sermons/>

**Church School** – Rosalie Finch and Laura Rousseau are holding weekly live Cool School on Zoom each Sunday at 10:00 am. If you would like to join or are not receiving our children and youth emails please contact Laura at [lrousseau@charleswood.org](mailto:lrousseau@charleswood.org) to be added.

Dear Friends

On the Christian calendar this Sunday is Ascension Sunday. It is the last Sunday in the season of Easter and it calls to mind the mysterious story in the first chapter of the book of Acts. It is an in-between story for Jesus and disciples, one that falls between the experience of the resurrection and the dawning of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is a time when questions are still being asked but the disciples are beginning to understand that God has done a wondrous and miraculous thing in Jesus yet they cannot see what that will mean for their life together.

We are living in in-between times. From what was normal to a 'new' normal that has yet to take shape. What we have going for us as we determine what will be is hope. Hope because we have experienced God's grace in the past and that empowers us to look forward with confidence to the new thing that is being born among us.

Welcome to this time of worship in the company of our church. Wherever you are, however you may be, whenever you choose to join us, we are glad that you are with us.

### **Opening Hymn**

Join the hymn "God of the Bible" by clicking here: [God of the Bible](#)

### **Bible Reading**

The Gospel Lesson for May 24 can be read it by clicking here: [Acts 1:6-14](#)

### **Solo**

Charleswood Music Scholarship recipient Nic Stroud sings the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm: [The Lord's My Shepherd](#)

### **Reflection**

There is a story that I have been telling in conversation to illustrate just how fast things were changing around the church when the coronavirus began to spread into Manitoba. On Sunday, March 8 we had worship and following it, our annual meeting. With the one exception that we had stopped the practice of shaking hands, there was nothing about that day to indicate what would happen in the next few months. We conducted all our business, heard reports of the year gone by, talked about our plans for 2020 and not once did we mention covid-19 or the possibility of a pandemic affecting our worship life. On March 10, just two days later I spent almost the whole day working on how we would have communion on Easter, something at that time which was still a month away. I consulted with a nurse who had been following medical reports on our behalf. I met with our Worship and Education Committee and plotted out all sorts of different options.

When a decision had been reached I wrote a pastoral letter that went out by email explaining what we would do about communion on Easter. By March 15, five days later, Council met after church and voted unanimously to follow the lead of the provincial health officials and suspend all activity and gathering. Even then we did so with a motion that said we would re-evaluate after three weeks.

How quickly things change. And how could we have foreseen what was to come. In some ways you might say we were unprepared for the pandemic that followed. But in other ways we were more than prepared because we are adaptable. We are a permission-giving congregation. We are a trusting people and had confidence in the 'people-who-know-stuff'. We may have been understocked in hand sanitizer but we were oversupplied with hope.

Hope is the resource we value almost more than anything else. Hope is the knowledge that God has been with us in difficult times in the past. Hope is the awareness that God is our companion in the trials through which we are now living. Hope is the assurance that God will walk us into the future to which God is leading us. It is summed up well in the words of the Remembrance Day hymn, "*O God are **help** in ages past, our **hope** for years to come.*"

It is Ascension Sunday, the Sunday before Pentecost, the last in the season of Easter. And on that day, the disciples are gathered with Jesus and they ask him a pivotal question, "Is this the time you are going to restore sovereignty to Israel?" It is their way of expressing that they know they are in a strange and in-between time. They have the resurrected Jesus in their midst but they do not yet know what God has in store for them. Jesus says to them, "It is not for you to know the date or time that God has chosen but the Holy Spirit will come upon you." Jesus is promising that God is going to do something for them that is going to open their eyes and fill them with hope. Something that will empower them with courage and conviction, but something they can't quite see yet.

We are living in in-between times. A moment Richard Rohr has called a liminal time. We know what has been. We're not exactly sure what next will be but we know God will act in the future much as God has acted in the past, with love, with hope, with peace, with mercy.

The biggest problem with our in-between time seems to be that we can't worship. But even that may be a blessing. I am somewhat dismayed by Christian communities who are almost panicking, and in some cases taking unnecessary risks, because they can't worship. As if not being able to be in the same room diminishes, in any way, our capacity to see the work of the Spirit among us. Paraphrasing the words of the hymn Amazing Grace, perhaps we have been blind when we had the freedom to worship but now we see. We can't worship but now we see the vulnerability of seniors in our community and those in care homes especially. We can't worship but now we see the value of solitude and slowing down, of focusing on home and family. We can't worship but now we see that the simplest way to care for a burdened and laboring creation is perhaps to leave it alone and heal along with it.

We can't worship but we can see all the things God is doing around us. Maybe what we need most of all is to take to heart the small phrase at the core of the mysterious story of the Ascension. Like Jesus, we rise. Actually, because of Jesus we rise. We rise to the occasion. We rise to the defense. We rise as One because there is One who is risen and who fills us with hope.

## Hymn

View and enjoy the Voices United hymn "Will You Come and Follow Me" by clicking here: [Will You Come and Follow Me](#)

## Prayers

Maker of Heaven and Earth, you are the One who put the sun and moon in their courses. You are the light of the morning star and the warmth of the mid-day sun. We celebrate your eternal goodness and give thanks for all that is around us that speaks of your grace. We thank you for the blessing of the company by whom we are surrounded even in a time of distancing.

There is something in the way you move that re-assures us. We praise you for the gifts of music and art that draws us into contemplation of your will for the world. We praise you for the myriad of remote ways musicians and artists have found to inspire and unite us in this moment.

There is something in the way you move that moves us. We rejoice in the calm and quiet, the peace and reflection in which we listen for your still, small voice.

There is something in the way you move that attracts us. Draw us closer each day to the truth that love is stronger even than death. Accept our prayers for the members of our global family who have lost their lives during this pandemic.

There is something in the way you move that comforts us. We pray for our sisters and brothers in the global community who find themselves grieving, in sorrow, or in pain.

There is something in the way you move that challenges us. We pray for the heroic efforts of those who are confronting disaster in the fires near Camperville and Pine Creek First Nation. We pray for the lives endangered by the floods in Michigan.

There is something in the way you move that empowers us. Bless our efforts to bring your ways of love and peace into the world where you move so freely.

God of every language, accept our prayers. Give us light, give us life, give us hope, help us cope. Let our hearts and souls reach you and be filled with all the wonder that is yours to give. In the Holy name of Jesus Christ who leads us to pray together when we say...OUR FATHER...

Be well, be safe, be hopeful.

Michael

## Postlude

Join Carla and Brendan in a parting song: [May the God of Hope Go With Us](#)