

Acts 1:6-14, Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35, 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11, John 17:1-11

### **INTRO**

Good morning! Thank you for tuning in to this recording for Sunday, May 24th, the 7th Sunday of the Easter season. Our Psalm today includes this verse, that I thought was appropriate for us:

***“You sent a gracious rain, O God, upon your inheritance;  
you refreshed the land when it was weary.” —Psalm 68:9***

Well, we've definitely had our share of rain this week, and now we're all probably ready for some sunshine. But it is refreshing when rain brings the earth to life in the springtime. And we pray that God would refresh us this morning as well by the power of his Holy Spirit as we worship & pray & open his Word together — that we, his people would be brought to life in Jesus.

One of the themes of this week's readings is that the stage is being set for the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which we'll celebrate next Sunday. The lessons today drop some hints of the life of the Spirit that fills God's church. So see if you can catch the references to the Holy Spirit in the lessons today.

Feel free to stop this recording to read the lessons if you haven't already done so. Our first reading is Acts 1:6-14 — the story of Jesus' ascension & the promise of the Holy Spirit that would be given to the disciples to empower them to be witnesses of Jesus' death & resurrection to the ends of the earth. Then, our Psalm is Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35. The next reading is 1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11 — This is Peter encouraging a young church to endure suffering — to endure in the Holy Spirit — and encouraging them that God cares for them & promises to restore & strengthen them. Then our Gospel lesson today — John 17:1-11 — is a part of a prayer that Jesus prays just before his crucifixion. He prays that God would be glorified in him, and he prays for his followers — that we would know him, and would stand together.

Now if you're a sports fan and have been missing sports these last couple of months, we'll pretend like this is a baseball game, touching base on each of these readings before coming home. (I'm sorry, this is the best I can do...) Because there's a common theme running through these lessons — in each one people are being taken out of their element.

***OUT OF YOUR ELEMENT***

Have you ever felt like you've been taken outside of your comfort zone, or out of your element? Sometimes, when we're taken out of our element we react poorly, and make knee-jerk, poor decisions. I get irrational & compulsive when I'm going through culture shock, for example.

When Marina & I moved to Mongolia, I responded by trying to furnish our apartment with Western-style furnishings to try to create a personal space that could be a comfortable, safe space for us in the midst of a foreign and unfamiliar world. I bought flooring, window coverings, furniture. I picked up a rug (2 metres x 3 metres) at the market that we took home through heavy traffic in a taxi rolled up with each end of the rug sticking out of a different window of the taxi. It became an irrational obsession for me.

Years later when we moved to Vancouver so that I could study, I did the same thing. We had a small patio to our townhouse & I quickly became obsessed that we needed to get a table & chairs for this patio. I don't know why I fixated on this, but I did. I didn't know where to get a table & chairs, so I settled on a big box store and paid way too much for a cheap, plastic table, complete with cheap, plastic chairs, and a folding umbrella for good measure. It didn't take long for me to wake up & feel embarrassed about what I had done. Sometimes when we're taken out of our element we do irrational things, we panic — or maybe it's just me, I don't know...

***ASCENSION***

We celebrated Ascension Day this week in the church — 40 days after Jesus' resurrection on Easter Day he ascended into heaven, which works out to be this last Thursday, May 21st. I'm sure everyone already knew that, and that you all celebrated with various Ascension themed party things: helium balloons released into the sky, trampoline parties or hot air balloon rides to re-enact the Ascension, or tickets on the next shuttle to the moon for that loved one who's driving you just a little nuts after two months of self-isolation...

40 days after Jesus' resurrection he ascended into heaven, and the disciples were there to witness it. It had been a bizarre & unexpected month & a half for them. Jesus had been arrested, crucified, buried, then miraculously risen from the dead & had reappeared to them. Trying to make sense of all this, the disciples wanted to grab onto anything that would make them feel like they were returning to certainty — to normal life. (This is where I would start doing something irrational.) And so they ask Jesus if now was the time in which he was going to

restore the Kingdom of Israel — back to the way in which things were meant to be. “Not in the way you expect” he responds.

***“But 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 ends of the earth.” —Acts 1:8***

I’m going to give you my Holy Spirit, he says, and I’m going to build my kingdom throughout the world, and through you. And then he ascends up into heaven, and the disciples all wonder if they had eaten some bad figs.

### **SUFFERING & ANXIETY**

There’s some comfort for us here — when we find ourselves out of our element, panicking & grasping for normalcy, God knows it, he sees it, and he cares for us through it all. We’ve all had to adjust to new and unusual circumstances these last few months. Some of it maybe hasn’t been so bad, but other parts have been difficult. Maybe you’ve gone irrational like me & insisted on redecorating the house, or taking the opportunity to alphabetize the books throughout your house, or label 30 years of photographs, or memorize Alberta bird species. If you go a little cuckoo when things aren’t normal, it’s ok.

Now that Jesus is ascended to the right hand of the Father, he is accessible to us in prayer — we don’t have to travel to Israel to try to find him. The Lutheran Reformers wrote in the Formula of Concord that Jesus has entered his glory,

***“...in such a way that he knows everything, is able to do everything, is present for all his creatures, and has under his feet and in his hands all that is in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, not only as God but also as human creature” —Formula of Concord, Epitome, VIII.11.***

No matter how irrationally we might be freaking out in life, we’re not so lost that we can’t talk to Jesus — can’t access him. Peter writes this too in his letter to a church that was experiencing persecution for their faith. He encouraged them,

***“If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.” — 1 Peter 4:14***

What he’s saying is that when we suffer for Jesus, we’re blessed because it actually brings us closer to him. We usually think that to get closer to Jesus we have to go to some exciting conference, or worship in a stadium with thousands of people, or climb some spiritual mountaintop. But Peter says that it’s in the depths, when we suffer for Jesus that we are drawn

closer to him and are blessed in ways unlike any other. And he encourages us when we're going through hardships for Jesus:

***“Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you... And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.” —1 Peter 5:7, 10***

### **GOD OF GLORY, GOD OF LOVE**

See, God is a very different kind of God than what we expect or assume. We might sometimes think that God is petty, vindictive, or grumpy — disappointed in us whenever we do something wrong. But that's not the kind of God he is at all — he longs to hear from us, to hear our concerns & worries, & to carry us through the hardships of life.

Jesus is certainly taken out of his element too — he's about to suffer and die. Jesus the new Adam is in a garden, and instead of giving in to temptation from his bride like the first Adam, he's praying for his bride — the church — for you and me. Where the first Adam lost the only one he was given, this new Adam hasn't lost a-one of who's been given to him. “All mine are yours, and yours are mine” Jesus prays (John 17:10). We are treasured gifts given to Jesus by the Father, and Jesus says simply knowing him is eternal life.

Five times in the opening verses when Jesus is praying for himself he prays about “glory”. And only once in the next paragraph when Jesus is praying for the church he prays about “glory”, but it's a doozy:

***“All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.” —vs. 10***

Jesus is glorified not through big, flashy churches, big budgets, impressive programs, good streaming technology, book sales, or conference ticket sales, but through ordinary believers following him — through people like you and me *knowing* him, dwelling with him and dwelling in unity.

### **UNITY**

The church is made up of all sorts of different types of people and traditions. When God promised Abraham children that number like the stars, we sometimes get confused and think he was promising denominations that number like the stars. The church sometimes feels so fragmented & divided — everyone who doesn't agree with each other starts their own church with some flashy new name and logo. I came across a church denomination this week called

“United House of Prayer for All People of the Church on the Rock of the Apostolic Faith.” Their sign is longer than the building, and their letterhead is in size 8 font...

It may seem like the church is divided, but in fact it's bigger and more united than you might think. There's a series of videos that have become really popular lately of church members singing the benediction — a blessing — in isolation over their countries, and it's a great cross-section of young and old, Protestant and Catholic and Orthodox, and different ethnicities all “coming together” to pray & sing in unity. We're going to leave a link online following this message so that you can see Canadian churches from across our country singing a blessing over our land. If we ignore the signs on our buildings, we might find that we just might be more united than we'd previously thought. The oneness that Jesus prays for is happening, and it will be complete one day.

### ***GOSPEL***

Every once in a while things come our way which launch us out of our element, where we lose control, and we freak out. “How can I have control over my life when I don't even have control over the dishes or the laundry or my finances, or my kids?” Well, the truth is we can't have control over our lives — there are too many variables outside of our control. But we are God's, and our lives are in his hands, and come what may we know that just as Jesus ascended to heaven into the presence of the Father so too will we be bodily resurrected to eternal life to dwell forever in the presence of the God who knows us and who loves us and who cares for all that we are going through & are concerned about, who came to earth out of love for us, who died out of love for us, who spent his last hours on earth praying for us — that we might know him. Put your trust in him, and he will carry you through the uncertainties of life.