

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER 2020
THE SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION DAY
THE DAY BEFORE MEMORIAL DAY

Material compiled by The Rev. Dr. Ralph W. Bayfield, May 24, 2020
Church of the Good Shepherd, Pine Grove, Bluemont, VA
Trinity Episcopal Church, Martinsburg, W.VA.

COLLECT OF THE DAY

O God the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior Christ has gone before; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

FOR THOSE IN THE ARMED FORCES OF OUR COUNTRY

Almighty God, we commend to your gracious care and keeping all the men and women of our armed forces at home and abroad. Those active, those retired, and those who gave their last full measure for the life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, the members of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Astronauts, the Marines, the Coast Guard and the Merchant Marine. Defend them day by day with your heavenly grace; strengthen them in their trials and temptations; give them courage to face the perils which beset them; and grant them a sense of your abiding presence wherever they may be; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

A Lesson from the Acts of the Apostles 1:6-14

When the apostles had come together, they asked him, “Lord is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 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.” When he had said this as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.” Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath’s day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter and John, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

The Word of the Lord

Psalm 68: 1-10 33-36

- 1 Let God, arise, and let his enemies be scattered;*
 let those who hate him flee before him.

- 2 Let them vanish like smoke when the wind drives it away;*
as the wax melts at the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

- 3 But let the righteous be glad and rejoice before God;*
let them also be merry and joyful.
- 4 Sing to God, sing praises to his Name; exalt him who rides upon the
heavens;* Yahweh is his Name, rejoice before him!
- 5 Father of orphans, defender of widows,* God in his holy habitation!
- 6 God gives the solitary a home and brings forth prisoners into
freedom;* but the rebels shall live in dry places.
- 7 O God, when you went forth before your people;*
when you marched through the wilderness,
- 8 The earth shook, and the skies poured down rain, at the presence of
God, the God of Sinai,* at the presence of God, the God of Israel.
- 9 You sent a gracious rain, O God, upon your inheritance;*
you refreshed the land when it was weary.
- 10 Your people found their home in it;*
in your goodness, O God you have made provision for the poor.
- 33 Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth;*
he sends forth his voice, his mighty voice.
- 34 He rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens;*
he sends forth his voice, his mighty voice.
- 35 Ascribe power to God;* his majesty is over Israel;
his strength is in the skies.
- 36 How wonderful is God in his holy places!* the God of Israel giving
strength and power to his people! Blessed be God!

A Lesson from the First Letter of Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. 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 upon you. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary, the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of grace, who has called you to eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. *Amen.*

The Word of the Lord.

*The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to
John 17:1-11*

Jesus looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your own presence before the world existence. I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

This *Seventh Sunday of Easter*, is also the Sunday between the *Ascension* of Jesus and the Sunday before *Pentecost*, traditionally called *Expectation Sunday*. For most of us, it is also the Sunday before *Memorial Day*!

The reading from *Acts 1:6-14* recalls the final earthly presence of Jesus before he is taken up to that heavenly dimension of life where he figuratively is at the place of honor, described in human terms as the right hand of God.

As the passage begins, the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem with Jesus after the Resurrection. They know that something important is to happen, but they are uncertain about what that is to be. So they ask Jesus if he will now “restore the kingdom to Israel.”¹ Although they were hoping for a declaration of the restoration of the throne of David, Jesus speaks instead of *personal transformation* through the Holy Spirit. This will empower them as his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

As Jesus ascends into heaven, Luke tells us, “two men in white robes”² appear and ask the disciples why they stand there gazing into the sky. They go on to promise that just as Jesus has so miraculously left them, he will come again in the same manner.

¹ *Revised Common Lectionary; Episcopal Edition: Year A, Seventh Sunday of Easter: Church Publishing Incorporated, New York, 2007; Acts 1:6 page 128*

² *ibid. Acts: 1:10*

The disciples return to Jerusalem and join the other followers of Jesus, women and men alike, to devote themselves to prayer.³ The community of Luke-Acts is not dismayed by the departure of Jesus, but waits in prayerful expectation for the power of God to come among them.

The Gospel passage is a portion of the “high priestly prayer”⁴ from the conclusion of Jesus Farewell Discourse at the Last Supper in John.⁵ Jesus offered this prayer for his disciples- of every place and time- on the night before he died.

As the Gospel begins, Jesus looks up to heaven and declares that his “hour has come.”⁶ This is the hour of Jesus’ self-offering, and through that offering he will come to glory. What appeared by worldly standards to be a shameful criminal crucifixion will be the means for Easter that will be the glorification of Jesus Christ as Lord. Thus, in our Gospel lesson, Jesus asks the Father to glorify the Son so that the Son may in turn glorify the Father. Jesus has been given authority to grant eternal life, through which the one true God and Jesus as God’s Messiah are manifested.⁷

Given the Glory of Jesus Christ and the promise of eternal life, we thank God. For given the worlds situation with thousands of people dying from the coronovirus and listening to the statistics every night we are truly in need of God’s healing graces. It is most disheartening. With things

³ *ibid.* Acts 1:12-14

⁴ *ibid.* Year A Seventh Sunday; John 17:1-26 page 129

⁵ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*; Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI 1984 *John*: 13:1-17:26 pages 763-766

⁶ *opp.cit.* *Revised Common Lectionary Year A Seventh Sunday of Easter: John 17:1* page 129

⁷ *Synthesis*; Year A :Franck, Paula, M.T.S.,PMNSI Publishing Co.,Boyd's, MD, June 1,2014 pg.1

beginning to open up, it is a fearful time to go out, especially with so many people running around who have not been tested. Who. knows what is going on. Being quarantined, having to wear masks and distancing oneself can be very discouraging and can weigh one down. I've heard several people say "What's the use."

Often our greatest needs seem to go unmet and our deepest questions go unanswered because we are prematurely and privately convinced that there is no help or answer possible. And so we rather bravely and stoically repress the need of the questions and try to go our way as if they didn't exist. Then, often they influence the surface and feelings of our lives with a haunting sense of sadness and futility.

For example, the thought that is appropriate for Memorial Day, expressed in that great hymn, "O God our help in ages past": then the stanza, "Time like an ever-rolling stream bears all its sons away; they fly, forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day."⁸ There's a sense of becoming anonymous, forgotten before long, if not now. Achieving immortality by being remembered in the minds and hearts of other people is not really immortality because of their mortality. More often than we admit this deep fact of mortality fosters a philosophy of "Whats the use? What difference does it make who we are, what we think, or say or do? Who will know or care a few years from now?" As the first sentence of the Biblical book of wisdom, *Ecclesiastes* says, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" A suggested modern translation puts it, "Futility of futilities, all is futility!"⁹

⁸ *The Hymnal 1982*; Watts, Isaac: Hymn 680, Church Hymnal Corp., New York, 1985

⁹ O'Hear, The Rev. John Legare, D.D., Sermon preached, Christ Church Christiana Hundred, Greenville, Delaware, May 30, 1976 page 1

That thought haunted Mark Twain, whose humor and wit, as you know covered his life in the Mississippi River town of Hannibal, from whence he became a drifter on the raft with his black boy friend when he discovered the segregation law that led him to admit one of the classical lines of all time, “I guess I’ll just have to die for that negro.” Mark Twain’s life had a certain sadness about it, as he went from Mississippi Riverboat Captain to unappreciated entertainer. He freely admitted like, many of us, that he tried his best to be famous and had found his fame and fortune and even family ties slipping between his fingers, being lost, and finished as he died a sick man in his bed in Hartford, Connecticut.

Many of us may feel that sad way as we wear our masks, and keep our six foot distancing today facing the threatening coronavirus. As I say, even before the pandemonium hit the world, there was that ever present secret thought that all of us shared. And its important and fascinating to face the question and see what Jesus says about it. Jesus says, of course it is futile to seek for ourselves earthly fame and glory, a kind of earthly immortality. Jesus agrees that that’s a poor reward at best. In fact, he advocates, we might say commands, the opposite: namely, secrecy in our part of His mission. He says:

“Be careful not to make a show of your religion before people; if you do, no reward awaits you in your Father’s house in heaven. Thus, when you do some act of charity, do not announce it with a flourish of trumpets, as the hypocrites do in a synagogue and in the streets to win admiration from people.” And he goes on to say with a note of irony: “I tell you this: they - have their reward already. No, when doing; your good act of charity, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing: your good deed

must be secret.” And here He adds what must be our real purpose in life: “Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

“Again, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers standing up in synagogue and at the street-corners, for everyone to see them. I tell you this: they have their reward already. But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place; and your Father who sees what is secret will reward you.”¹⁰

“When you fast, be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto people to fast. I tell you this: they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that people may not see that you are fasting, but only your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”¹¹

The questions within us about the significance of our lives, our immortality, are God-implanted questions within us. The answers are not what we often may think they are: that our lives have no lasting significance; that our personhood is vague and unsure, and that our immortality is extremely doubtful. The reason we think that way, Jesus explains, is that we seek in worldly terms our significance, our identity, and Our immortality rather than finding them in a relationship with God our heavenly Father and Jesus Christ.¹²

¹⁰ *ibid. The Holy Bible; Matthew 6:1-6*

¹¹ *ibid; Matthew 6:16-18*

¹² *ibid. John 17:1-11*

What a hard time Jesus had with his disciples! James and John sent their mother to ask Jesus that they might sit in places of authority on his right and on his left in his kingdom. And Jesus had to tell her, “You know that in the world, rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you, but whoever would be great among you must be your servant....Just as the Son of Man (Jesus description of Himself) came not to be served but to serve.”¹³

By losing our lives, Jesus said, in His service and in the service of our brothers and sisters we will find ourselves, our significance, our identity, our immortality. The real saints welcome the anonymity of humble service. The real saints are hard to find because they run before anyone can give them credit.

What a wonderful thought for Memorial Day! The myriads of men and women who have given their lives in the service of their fellow human beings are not forgotten like a dream because God knows every one of them, and the more the world is unable to remember them the more humility of their sacrifice qualifies them for the kingdom of heaven. *Amen.*

Let us pray: The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, be with the many persons who have died from the Covoid 19 disease. Protect us all from this terrible coronovirus, and may we have health and peace in the knowledge of your healing grace, eternal life, and love for all of us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

¹³ opp.cit. *Matthew 20:20-28*

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, for ever and ever. *Amen*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. *Amen*¹⁴

¹⁴ *ibid.* 2 Corinthians 13:14