

Dear followers of the Ascended Lord,

I want you to close your eyes and look up. Imagine that we have fast forwarded a year and you are sitting in our new building at worship as we are celebrating the festival of our Lord's Ascension. And there in front of you is that beautiful stained glass portrayal of our ascended Savior. Remember what we told the artist to go with – the portrayal of the crucifixion will be on your left, in front of you is the Ascension, and then on your right will be the Holy Spirit our ascended Lord sends to you?

Think about that. The central piece of art, the thing you'll be looking at, God-willing, for as long as we are worshipping in phase 1 of our new building – is what today is all about. Exactly 40 days after Jesus rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven. That's what we celebrate today. And I want you to think about what it will be like to Look up and see Jesus.

That's what our text invites us to do in so many ways – not necessarily the way the disciples were, but in so many ways: Look up and see Jesus.

There the disciples were, right? Looking up, but not seeing Jesus. Just standing there, looking up. Jesus was done talking. He had been raised up off the ground and taken into heaven; he seemingly disappeared into the clouds. And they stood there – I've always imagined with their mouths open and their feet fixed...until those two angels called them back to attention. ¹¹ **"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."**

"What are you looking at? Don't you get it yet? He's gone. And He'll come back. Meanwhile, you've got work to do." But that's just it. This whole Ascension thing is so mind-blowing it's hard to keep up, because it is so contrary to the way we're naturally wired that we need to be reminded. We'd think it would be better to have him physically here, leading us, like those disciples had for a while. But he knows better and he wants us to learn that too. That's why we're putting the picture of the ascended Lord up in front – to keep front and center in our hearts and minds what it means that Jesus is victorious and ascended; now sitting at the right hand of the Father.

And don't miss the significance of the angels. They always seem to be sent when there is something that we need explained, don't they? Do you remember the last time angels appeared before this? They were explaining what the empty tomb meant that it wasn't a problem, but a solution, not a lost body, but life won. And before that, the last time they communicated with humans – they were explaining a birth that wasn't just some poor girl's kid, but peace on earth and God's good will toward men, and then giving that baby's parents some direction. And before that they came to explain a crazy conception – that it wasn't Mary's infidelity, but God's incarnation.

We need these reminders to look up and see Jesus. The disciples did – a couple times here in our text. The obvious one was the one the angels corrected – their zoning into the sky instead of getting to work – but look at the other one earlier, the one Jesus himself corrected. Look at the question they ask. There in verse 6 – after Jesus had suffered and died, after Jesus had risen from the dead, after he had reminded them what his kingdom was all about – still his disciples ask: **"Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"**

After seeing everything they had seen, that is what they ask?! History is a funny thing, isn't it? As important as it is to learn the lessons of the past – history can start to play with our minds as we get our perception of what happened and the way we see it and start to distort what is happening now... we miss what is really going on. The disciples had heard the stories of the "Good ole days," right? With David and Solomon and power and prestige – and Israel was strong. And they wanted that instead of what they had now. Regardless of all the problems Israel had had at that time with David's blunders and Solomon's unfaithfulness, regardless of the suffering the people had to go through then and how much they complained then – *those* things weren't remembered and the disciples longed for that image of that earthly power and control here on earth. They wanted Jesus to use his power for what they were looking at and missed what was so clearly happening NOW.

Have you ever been caught up in that – staring at the “good ole days” instead of looking up and seeing what opportunities and privileges God has put in front of you now? You remember the puppy love at the beginning of your relationship and long for it again, not realizing the power experience and growth has to benefit your relationship. You recall how great your old car was as you complain about the one you have now forgetting why you got the new one in the first place. You remember the “good ole days” of family and friends and disparage what you’ve got now.

All that is senseless and bad enough in itself, but when we start looking at our life of faith or the practice of our religion with this “good ole days” mentality, we’ve really crossed the line. Look up and See Jesus. The Good Ole Days is not why Jesus came.

Look at how Luke starts. He wrote his first book (the Gospel of Luke) to help us see Jesus and his power and his love. There we have God’s perfect, accurate, historical record to see Jesus clearly, not through our distorted eyes of sin. Look at how Luke summarizes that here when he talks about how we see Jesus now: **“After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.”** That’s what it is all about. Christ died for your sins. He suffered. And Christ is Risen. You are forgiven. He proved that by hanging out with the disciples, reminding them of their forgiveness, teaching them. Look up and see Jesus, who gives you the proof of what really matters.

But don’t forget also to look up and see Jesus who gives you power. You see, Jesus’ ascension means that his death and resurrection wasn’t the end. Our salvation was completed at a moment in the past on Calvary and at that empty tomb. But the death and resurrection of Christ is not just there for us to remember. It is there for us to live, to bask in the glory of.

Jesus ascended to his position of power and authority that our Ephesians lesson described, **“Far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given”** – he ascended there to keep accomplishing His work. So look up and see Jesus, who gives the power. Did you notice in the first words of the text that Luke said his gospel (the Gospel of Luke) was about the things Jesus “began” to do and to teach”? Now, as Luke writes another book - Acts, it starts where that beginning ends. Jesus is still doing and teaching. Look at how.

In verse 8 Jesus tells his disciples: **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”** Jesus didn’t stay there physically with his disciples like they were looking for him to do. He left them physically so that he could be with us always. No, we don’t see him floating in the air here. Even the disciples didn’t after the cloud hid him from their eyes. He left. But that doesn’t mean he’s not here. He ascended out of this world, but not for a vacation, not for a rest. The book of Acts, Luke says, is His continuing work – through His body, the Church.

The Ascended Lord is an active Lord. And here is the best part. He’s active in us. Notice, He doesn’t say his disciples *have* the power. It is not something in themselves. They *receive* power. **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”** It is only when the Holy Spirit works through them that powerful things happen. Jesus doesn’t tell them to convert someone or to grow a church – but simply says “you are receiving power – to be my witnesses.”

And that is exactly what he says to you. Yes, he is ascended, but he is here with you always, even to the end of the age. Yes, he is ascended, “but he is coming back,” as the angels said, to take us to be with him. Yes, he is ascended, but he is ruling His Church and he keeps on sending His Holy Spirit - through this powerful Word so that you can see Jesus, through the sacrament we’re about to receive – where we get to not just see Jesus, but touch and taste his body and blood. And when he sends that Spirit? **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”** Power for what? As Jesus puts it – **“To be my witnesses”** That’s what we are.

When you look up and see Jesus, you become witnesses of Him... **“In Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** Even before the stained glass window gets installed, let’s learn from our text and Look up and see Jesus. And then others will see him in you.

In Christ,
Amen.