

The Rev. Joshua Wullenweber
Sunday, May 12, 2024
Ascension of our Lord
Luke 24:44-53

One of my early trips with the Air Force took me to Las Vegas, Nevada. Having never been before I found myself awestruck with all that this fairly small city in the middle of the desert had to offer. If you've ever been, you know Las Vegas is unlike any other place in the world. Well one night after the flying schedule was complete, my friends and I decided to explore the strip and I could not get over all the lights, and sounds, and people, and building. Everywhere I looked I was amazed. On one side I saw the neon lights of the MGM and the on the other I saw the lights of Caesars Palace - I could not take my eyes off the skyline - well that was until I ran straight into a fire hydrant leaving me with quite a bruise on leg and even bigger bruise on my ego as my buddies could not stop laughing.

In life we should take time to look up but we must also remember to look out.

So is the lesson we hear today from Luke the evangelist. Both in his writings from the gospel text and the book of Acts - we hear the account of Jesus' final moments with his disciples and his glorious ascension to God above. Putting ourselves in the disciples shoes, we can only imagine how glorious of a sight that must have been to watch and witness this event unfold. They knew that Jesus would not be with them forever but to watch as he ascended to heaven - being raised in a way you've ever seen before - it must have been something that they could not take their eyes off of. Like the sun gazers of the recent solar eclipse - I am sure there was not one eye looking at the ground but all were looking up with their eyes affixed to the heavens.

But yet, that is not where the disciples' eyes stay. Rather we hear today that looking out, keeping our eyes on our surroundings, keeping our eyes on the path ahead is exactly the call of the disciples. We hear as an angel of the lord appears and reminds the disciples that their ministry is not up but out and forward. The people and church that they have been called and equipped to serve is in front of them.

Now I think it's a common practice whenever we talk to God to look up. I will admit that's me everyday - when I pray, when I talk to God, when I contemplate life's deepest theological mysteries - I look up, I gaze into the heavens, I stare into the deep blue sky. I don't think there is anything wrong with that but that's not where our eyes and our minds and our hearts are called to always remain. They are called to be looking at what's in front of us, the here and now, the people, places, and situations we are currently involved with. That is where we are called to focus our eyes and time and attention.

The needs of God's people and our community are so great and if we spend our time always looking up we will miss those in need who are right in front of us. I give thanks for our partnership with the food bank and the ways that we help feed the hungry but I also wonder what other needs exist in our community. Where else is God calling us to serve and be. In conversation with members of this church and people in the community I am told there is a large migrant community that lives on the outskirts of town - with our eyes to the ground how do we see them and what they might need - ESL classes, legal assistance, employment opportunities. I am also told that Lovettsville and the surrounding community has also an aging community with many of its residents on fixed incomes, in poor living conditions, with medical needs - how do we see them, how with our eyes looking out do we serve them more fully.

With our eyes affixed to the sky we *may* get a glimpse of God but for sure with our eyes looking out, focused on the world around us, we will surely see the God we seek standing right before us. We will see God in the families that we feed. We will see God in the people that we cloth. We will see God in the homes that we restore. And we will see God in the lives that we make whole.

The ascended Christ makes a clear path for us to God. As Jesus says in the book of John I am going before you to prepare a place for you. Hearing in our creeds we confess that Jesus sits at the right hand of God and with that knowledge we know that we too will be there also - but - we are not there yet and because of this we still have work to do. As Luke writes in our reading from Acts it is in this in between time that the Holy Spirit will guide and empower us to be witnesses' of Christ to our communities. To share the love we have been given. To offer the grace we have first experienced. To witness to Christ crucified, risen, and ascended.

So to rephrase the words of the angels this morning - people of New Jerusalem, why are we only looking up - Jesus will surely come again, but in the meantime let us look out and see all the places God resides here and now and let us meet him on the street corners, in the neighborhood, and out and about in our world.

Amen.