

Scripture: Acts 1:6-14

Sermon Title: "Look Out"

Rev. Josh Fitterling

Ascension Day – we rarely mark it anymore as a day in which we pause and celebrate the majesty of it. Most churches, most denominations at least in the United States, don't really do anything special on that Thursday when it rolls around each year and we tend to celebrate the Ascension on the following Sunday as we are today. And so, often that Thursday passes as just another day in our living. But the truths behind it are worth pondering and embracing and so we embrace the Ascension today. I remember, growing up on our family farm in Pennsylvania, that Ascension Day, while it wasn't marked with a church service or a big family meal like Christmas or Easter generally were, was still observed by my parents. In fact, many traditions have continued to this day among some farmers especially those who mark the Holy Days of the Christian year with some expression of reverence and there are in fact traditions around the world too that still take place. Ascension Day on the farm was often treated as one might treat a Sunday. It was a day in which no field work was done – in fact, I remember being told something to the effect of you should never plant a seed on Ascension Day, for on this day we celebrate what rises and so we bury nothing in the ground. And while that was not a command founded in Scripture or the teaching of Christ, it was a meaningful one to my parents and for many farmers who paused in the middle of an often busy planting season to honor the day when we celebrate Christ's ascension and to honor the reign of Jesus as he is seated next to God the Father. It was really a day in which we paused and looked up, as one tends to do on Sundays and Sabbaths to reflect on the glory of God and all that was revealed in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. And that is what we find the disciples doing today, isn't it? Looking up. They see Jesus ascending into the heavens and then out of sight. And yet, as they were looking up, the two men, angelic beings in white robes came and said essentially, why are you looking up? This question infers that they should not be

looking up anymore but shifting their attention back to the earth. However, is there a problem with pausing and looking up? Is there harm in only looking up?

I remember one summer afternoon, when my brother and I were just youngsters on the farm, we had been helping our dad with some of the farm work. And as we hopped in the pickup truck after we had finished and we were heading back to the house, my brother and I, rather than jumping in the cab of the truck with our dad, decided we wanted to ride in the back, in the bed of the truck which was always an exciting thing for us kids to do. And being that it was a relatively short drive on a farm lane that we were traveling, our dad allowed it. And so we got in and stood in the back, right behind the cab, so that we could see over the top of the truck and know exactly where we were headed. But something off in the distance must have caught my attention and I found myself staring off to the side, perhaps even daydreaming as we headed down the lane. When all of a sudden, my brother exclaimed, "duck!" And I looked straight up into the sky and said, "where?" And wham! The leafy end of a low hanging tree branch slapped me right in the face. It turns out that, as you may have already figured out, my brother wasn't telling me to look up to the sky to spot some waterbird with webbed feet flying through the air but instead he was telling me to pay attention to where we were going, to pay attention to what was coming our way, and to look out for the branch that I was apparently destined to meet.

The Ascension of Jesus that we hear about today always reminds me of that experience and reminds me of the answer to that question of what is the harm in only looking up? If all we ever do is look up to heaven, we miss what's going on around us. If all we ever do is look up to heaven, we run the risk of getting slapped in the face by life. If all we ever do is look up to heaven, we never live out the last words that Jesus spoke to the disciples before he ascended – for if we only look up, how can we be witnesses to the truth of God revealed in Jesus to the world? If we only look up, how will we see the fallen and downtrodden who need an act of love to restore them to life. The harm in just looking up, is that we would never look out into the world that needs to know the love

of God. The harm in just looking up, is that we would not live the life that Jesus calls his disciples to live – one that shares God’s love, cares for the vulnerable, loves one another.

Now, I want to make it clear, that this is not to say that looking up to heaven from time to time is a bad thing. In fact, the disciples who were gathered with Jesus as he ascended were left to look up before being reminded to look out. They were left to bask in the glories of Jesus, the love of God, the wonder of all that was revealed to them in the life and resurrected life of Christ, and then reminded to look out and to go show the glories of Jesus to the world, to live the love of God, and to share the wonder of Christ in everything that they would come to say and do.

As I mentioned earlier, it was a farming tradition in Central Pennsylvania for many old school, Christian farmers to not plant on Ascension Day. To take it as a Sabbath of sorts and to look up and pause to consider the glories of God once more. And yet, when evening fell on Ascension Day and dawn broke the next, the farmers who paused the day before to look up, were now looking out again – looking out at God’s creatures that needed to be fed, at God’s beloved people that needed to be fed – and they would plant again. For the world needed to see the love of God revealed in growing food. To see the love of God revealed in filled bellies. To see the love of God revealed in abundance.

There is nothing wrong with looking up and cherishing the glories of God, but it must be followed with looking out. Looking out into the world that needs Christ’s disciples to love it as God’s loves it. Looking out in the world to live a life that celebrates all that we see and know when we look up – to celebrate all of that with a life that touches other lives. To not only celebrate that Jesus the Son rules alongside of God the Father, but to show with our lives that Jesus rules our hearts. To share all that we see when we look up and allow that to propel us as we look out and share that good, good news through all that we say and all that we do.

And so, like we do every Sunday, we come and we pause and we look up and cherish and worship our Great God. But our worship does not end with the benediction or the

postlude for our worship continues as we move from looking up to looking out and going forth for God. Going forth to live a changed life and to change the lives of others through that good, good news. So yes, let us pause and look up. And then let us go, and look out. Amen.