



SPIRITUAL MYOPIA

Ascension of our Lord Sunday

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Acts 1:1–11, Ephesians 1:15–23, Luke 24:44–53

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord who is the Savior Jesus the Christ, AMEN.

A few years ago I went to see an eye doctor to get my glasses updated. After the eye exam he said “I had some good news and some bad news for you. The good news, you have 20/20 vision. The bad news is that you have aging eye myopia – near sightedness”. Of course I wondered how could a person have both 20/20 vision and be near sighted. The doctor explained as the eye gets older it takes longer to focus between distance and those things up close. So the solution was new glasses. Not just any glasses, it was time for bifocals. The tops are totally clear allowing me to see normally while looking up. The bottoms are amplified for reading or detail work. It’s quite common for people to have trouble when getting use to bifocals. Walking can be strange at first, some people even get motion sickness from bifocals. For me serving communion was odd at first. You see a 1 pint chalice but to me it looked like a half gallon cup, at first. But that was okay, your mouths looked like Martha Raye’s mouth for a while.

I came across an interesting statistic the other day. It said that 1 in 3 people in America are near-sighted, to one degree or another. This means that 30% of all Americans, not just those with glasses, have trouble seeing things far away, but have no problem seeing things up close. This same article stated that roughly 60% of all Americans suffer from varying degrees of far-sightedness, meaning that roughly 6 out of every 10 people in America have a tough time seeing things up close. They can see things out beyond a arm's length without any trouble. But if they read a book or a newspaper within that too close zone you begin to see them doing all kinds of crazy things with their eyes and their arms.

When I read this particular statistic it made me wonder about our Spiritual lives. I wonder what percentage of people, suffer from Spiritual far-sightedness? In other words how many people have difficulties seeing Christ up close in their lives—in their midst. To some of you this may seem like the wrong question considering the fact that the lessons for this morning center around the ascension of Jesus into heaven. Given the fact that Jesus went up and away into Heaven, wouldn't the question be framed better in the context of near-sightedness. For those who don't see or believe that Jesus did rise again and did ascend into Heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father until that day that He will come again in all His glory to judge both the living and the dead? After all doesn't being far sighted mean we can look out, into the far depths of the future for such things, rather than being nearsighted only looking at the right here and right now?

Don't get me wrong. That's a good question too. You know as well as I do that there are plenty of people out there who don't see Jesus at all, let alone recognize the fact that He will be coming again, unexpected, like a thief in the night. If people could have that sort of faithless near-sighted vision problem corrected, the world we live in would look and sound very different, that is certain. But that's really not what these lessons are about today. I know that may sound strange to you, but these Ascension lessons really aren't about a Jesus who has gone off to a far, far away paradise we call Heaven, leaving this world behind to fend for itself until He returns again. These lessons are about a Savior—our Lord and Savior—who is right here with us, right now!

I can hear the wheels turning in your minds, "But pastor, these lessons plainly say, Jesus went up and out of their sight." And you're absolutely right! But be careful: These same lessons never say how high Jesus

ascended. They never say what His altitude was when the disciples finally lost track of Him does it? Why? Because, as I said before, these lessons aren't really about a now-absent and far away Jesus.

Just look at the Ascension account recorded in Acts. What does it say? It says—plain as day—that Jesus was simply taken up and a cloud took Him from their sight. That is where our assumptions often take over, causing us to shape and shave Scripture to fit to our own notions of how things happened. We see these words saying that the disciples were staring up into heaven, up into the clouds, and we assume that this means some sort of strained gaze into the atmosphere, a dazzling height of great altitude. What we forget is the fact that Scripture uses the word "heaven" in three unique ways. The blue sky overhead is considered "the heavens." The starry nighttime sky beyond the blue sky is considered the second heaven. And there's third Heaven as we understand it; the place of eternal rest and paradise. That's what St. Paul calls "the third heaven" in 2 Corinthians 12:2.

I imagine some of you are thinking, "Alright pastor, you just said that Heaven is out beyond the blue sky and the stars in space." But, I didn't. Neither did Scripture. In fact, if you might remember the account of St. Stephen, you'll recall that while he was being stoned to death, battered, bloody and beaten, on the very brink of death. Then he looked up and saw Heaven opened wide with Christ standing at the right hand of God. Think about that. How strong would your eyesight need to be? Strong enough to have your gaze penetrate beyond Troposphere, through the Stratosphere, Mesosphere and Thermosphere into the deepest recesses of space to spy a glimpse of that distant land called Heaven? It's very unlikely probably no chance at all. After all if Dr. Hubble couldn't do it with his telescope what chance do you have with your bare eyes? Heaven is where God is, and God is not far away.

The question then, "Is what does all this have to do with the Ascension? What does any of this have to do with me?" The answer is everything! It never ceases to amaze me how faithlessly far-sighted we get in our day-to-day lives. Notice: I didn't say how the other person or the unbeliever struggles. I said "us." Like the vision statistics I cited earlier, everyone is included here. In fact, the sad reality is some people who call themselves "faithful Christians" suffer from far-sighted blindness, missing the loving and gracious presence of Christ in their very midst; right in front of their noses. How many of you, when times get tough, look around and thinking where is Jesus now? Has He left me and returned to heaven? "If only Jesus were here today!" Or are you duped into the temptation: "If the cat's away, the mice can play! I will just go ahead and do what I want, sin as I will, after all no one is here to see". Don't be fooled, Jesus is present and does see and is here.

Jesus is truly here among His people. Please understand: I don't mean in some sort of spiritual, heart string pulling sort of sentimental way; I mean really, truly, locally physically present here? He says He is. Faith trust in things we cannot see and it takes Jesus at His word. Like when He says: "THIS IS MY BODY, THIS IS MY BLOOD!" As Lutherans, we believe, teach, and confess the real and ongoing presence of Christ Jesus. And Jesus said, "***Lo I am with you always, even to the very end of the age***" (Matthew 28:20). Was Jesus just kidding, was He acting like some sort of idle schoolboy busy stretching the truth? Was He just talking in some sort of sweet, spiritualistic, sentimental kind of way to comfort us? Absolutely not! He meant what He said and He said what He meant.

Brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus: Your Lord and Savior is not far-removed from you. He's not somewhere way out there, looking down at you from that distant, far-away heaven. Our Lord is right here among you. Can you see Him? I guess that depends on what eyes you're looking through: the eyes of the flesh, humanism with its sinful reason and logic or the eyes of saving faith. Yes: He is hidden from our sight in terms of seeing and beholding a living, breathing man, just like that cloud hid Him from the disciples. Because of this perceived absence, our fallen reason and logic therefore concludes, and worse yet, professes, that He's

gone, Jesus has left the planet. Seeing for most of us is very much believing, isn't it? Or maybe we think He's here, in some sort of schmaltzy manner, but physically, "I just can't get my mind around that!" This is how our sinful logic sees things.

Saving faith sees things differently. Through the eyes of faith; the eyes that the Holy Spirit opens in us through the hearing of the Word, we are able to truly see and behold our abiding and reigning Lord and King. Christ is not gone! He is right here before your very eyes in His Word and Sacrament. When Christ ascended, He ascended into the sacramental life of the Church. This is how your Lord continues to come to His people—through simple and earthly, yet hidden means—Word and Water, Bread, and Wine.

That's what these Ascension lessons are all about. That's what those angels were getting at with the disciples as they stared foolishly into the heavens. **"Why are you looking way out there for Jesus?"** (Acts 1:11). Like corrective lenses, the words of the God's messengers speak loud and clear, directing our vision back to earth; back to Jesus who is still locally, yet hidden, present with us today. Our Emmanuel.

Brothers and Sisters in the faith: Are you beginning to see how the different errors and heresies that creep into the Church have their footing in an absent, far-away and removed Jesus? Are you beginning to understand that saving faith is grounded in the Christological truth of what Jesus said in Matthew 28:20: **"I am with you always?"**

My hope, my prayer for you is that the ongoing, ever-present reality of your ascended Lord and Savior will forevermore be recognized in these humble means of grace and boldly confessed in all that you say, do and think. Whether you want to admit it or not, we live in the midst of a people who are themselves gazing, as well as wrongly directing other people's gaze, into the outermost heavens for a long-departed and now-absent Jesus who will hopefully someday return. By God's grace, you know the gracious present-tense truth. You know the blessed peace that comes with trusting in the reality of your ever-present Lord and Savior who is truly active and among His people in His very Word and His Sacraments. For the Lord has blessed you with Spiritual Myopia the ability to see Him near and here.

May this Gospel truth bring you peace; the peace that surpasses all understanding; the peace of your ascended yet ever-abiding Lord and Savior be and remain with you always. In Jesus name, amen and amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, AMEN!