

“LOOK UP!”

Dear Friends in Christ,

I want to let you in on a little secret about a problem I have in my life: *I have a hard time looking up.* Not spiritually, but physically, when it comes to my neck. I can't really look up very long without getting a headache or dizzy because of a couple of messed up cervical disks. I even had an MRI a few years ago and the slight bulges were quite evident but there was no way after the neurosurgeon told me they cut through the front to get to the back that such a fix was going to happen! So, I have a hard time looking up, at least for any length of time.

How appropriate then that I get this Lenten assignment on the Apostles Creed: *“He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”* This important article in our confession of faith is clearly recorded in the Scripture from the Book of Acts: *[Read it with me from page 5 in your bulletin]*

⁹And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

(Acts 1:9-11)

There is simply no way, you see, to talk about the Ascension of our Lord without *“looking up!”* It used to be one of my favorite children’s sermon’s about the life of Jesus, using a big balloon to illustrate how Christ who was *“crucified, died and buried, who descended into hell and on the third day rose again, ascended into heaven where He sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”*

What it means, as Luther explains in The Small Catechism, is that *“Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary”* is back where He belongs – in heaven! The Ascension of our Lord assures you and me that *“we have a friend in higher places!”* The very Savior whose sandals walked the dusty and dirty roads of Palestine now traverses the streets of heaven! We have a victorious Lord and Savior that we can always be *“looking up to; turning to; and counting on”* as we continue our journey on this earth. He came down here to be for us what we could not be; lived the life we couldn’t, died the death our sin deserved and rose on Easter morn to give everlasting life to all who believe! With Jesus *“up there”* now - having defeated sin and death for us *“down here”* – there is no way we can lose because we believe in Jesus Christ who *“descended into hell”* to proclaim victory over Satan’s domain; who *“rose on the third day,”* declaring victory over sin, death and the grave; and now, who *“ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty!”*

What a powerful affirmation of our faith – and, my friends, we need to believe it, *[you need to believe ; I need to*

believe it] because sometimes – no, a “lotta” times - it doesn’t look so good and feel so good down here. If we aren’t able by faith, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, to “*Set our minds on things above, not on the things that are on earth,*” (Col 3:2) then we could easily lose hope when “*things*” down here aren’t going our way! If we can’t “*lift up our eyes unto the hills,*” as the Psalmist writes, and believe “*that our help cometh from the Lord,*” then we can so easily get mired in the muck of this sinful and fallen world, Satan doing a rat-a-tat-tat on our hearts, circumstances leaving us feeling depressed, defeated and all alone, victims “*of*” rather than victors “*over!*”

The Ascension of Christ is so important because it gives believers a perspective of eternity’s hope that sustains us when sin, suffering and sorrow do their thing in our lives. The One who “*sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty*” is declared in the Book of Revelation as the Lamb who sits on the throne, promising a place and a time when “*God will be with his people....and wipe every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for all the old order of things has passed away.*” (Revelation 21:3-5)

Even though it hurts my neck, I need a faith that challenges and invites me to “**look up!**” We all do, drawn in this Lenten Season to the image of the Christ who suffered on Calvary’s Cross now risen and ascended, sitting, reigning and ruling, no matter is happening in our lives down below. He will come again, and until He does, we have this faith in Christ that enables us to reach out and up, almost like a tug on

a balloon string, reminding us, *“Don’t be afraid; don’t give up; continue to trust; be bold in serving”* for He is still *“up there”* and *“everywhere”* fulfilling the promise the Risen Lord made to His followers: *“And lo, I will be with always, even to the close of the age!”* (Matthew 28:20) Jesus Christ is, as one writer puts it, is *“our Man in heaven,”* revealed in the book of Hebrews, as our *“Great High Priest who has gone through the heavens and is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses...who lives to intercede for his people... therefore let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we might receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”* (Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25)

The story is told of a little boy who went outside on a windy spring day to fly his new kite. As the wind blew, the kite flew higher and higher until it was but finally a tiny distant speck in the sky far above. After a few minutes a bystander asked, *“How do you know the kite is still attached to the string?”* And the little boy replied, *“I can still feel it tugging.”*

That’s what I feel every time I **“look up”** - the tug of faith reminding me, no matter what I can’t see or fail to understand, that He’s still there, for me...for you! *I believe in Jesus Christ...who ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.* How about you...do you believe...the pull of faith tugging on your heart this night?

Let’s rise and confess this faith....