

St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
The Ascension of Our Lord (Observed)  
May 16, 2021

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Acts 1: 9-11 And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and 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 sought Him go into heaven."

During the Civil War, the actions of one army nurse in particular became the subject of concern on the part of her superiors. After a battle, she was often inclined to wander away from the makeshift hospital area and go out onto the actual battlefield. Quite often she would come back with a soldier who was in special need of medical attention. I would also add that it made no difference to her whether the wounded was wearing blue or gray, the nurse would venture out, perhaps commandeer a stretcher-bearer or two, and bring the wounded back.

Now, believe it or not, this was a time when women nurses were not yet fully appreciated. The battlefield hospital was viewed as no place for the fairer sex. And this lady's noble actions actually ended up earning her a gentle reprimand. But even then, after the next battle, she was seen once again wandering around the combat zone, searching among the wounded. Finally an officer came out and began and to scold. He said, "You have been instructed. What do you think you are looking for on the..." but before he could finish, she stopped him short with an icy stare, and snapped with a voice that wasn't going to tolerate any further conversation: "what am I looking for? I'm looking for the wounded. Looking for wounded is what I do." The nurse, Clara Barton, knew what she was looking for.

Unfortunately, that can't be said for all of us, although every era and age of life finds most people looking for something. As young children, we're looking to get older when we can stay up later, go out longer, and watch movies that are rated "PG." As teens, we are perhaps looking for popularity, acceptance and understanding, and a license that will enable us to drive. As college graduates, we're looking for a job in our field of study where we can earned the highest possible income to pay off our college loans. After we break into the working world, we're

looking for success and promotion, perhaps a lifetime mate with which to start a family, the ideal home in the perfect neighborhood.

You get the idea. We're always looking, but not always do we find what we're looking for—probably because what we think we're looking for, what we think we want, is just beyond our grasp.

In the course of Jesus' earthly ministry, He ran into a lot of people who were looking for things they didn't get. After He fed the 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes, He had a whole crowd of people who looked at Him like He could be their free meal ticket. They figured that, if Jesus could do this kind of miraculous multiplication on a regular basis, their lives would be made much easier. But Jesus was not inclined to play that role. He had come to feed the world NOT with barley loaves and fish, but with the Bread of Life—his Gospel of forgiveness, life, salvation, and peace.

There were others who looked to Jesus for things they didn't get. There was the Samaritan woman at the well who asked Jesus to give her what He called "living water" thinking that she would no longer have to make for daily walks to the well in the heat of the day and face the stares of gossiping women. But Jesus' living water was something far better. He revealed Himself as the promised Messiah, the Savior, and gave her saving faith, forgiveness of all her sins, eternal life and salvation. Ironically, there were other people—people from the Savior's own hometown of Nazareth, no less—people who didn't care about His claim to be the Messiah. They were looking for this "hometown boy" to do some miraculous workings and healings like He had already done in other places. They actually became so resentful that they tried to throw Him over a cliff, until He got away from them.

Later, when Jesus was crucified, one of the thieves crucified with Him looked for Jesus to simply get them down from the cross. He just wanted to be spared so that he could return to his life of sin, so he said, "Jesus, if you are the Christ, save yourself and us." That thief didn't get what he was looking for he died and was damned forever because of his own belief. But the other thief who saw in Jesus his hope for heaven—he believed and prayed like millions since: "Jesus, remember me when You come home to Your kingdom," and he was assured by the Savior that he would be with Him in paradise. You see, the point is, you may not always get what you're looking for, but as long as you believe in Christ, you really can't lose, because you get something far better – eternal life and salvation.

Even Jesus' own disciples didn't always see what they were looking for. They wanted to reserve Jesus' ministry for what THEY deemed important. They didn't want Him bothered by mothers with their crying, whiny children. But Jesus Himself did not let that stand. He wanted then, as He still wants today, to have children brought to Him. "Permit the children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." James and John wanted to see fire fall from heaven and consume a Samaritan village that had not welcomed Jesus and them into their midst. But that didn't happen either. Even Peter wanted to see Jesus deterred from the road to the cross where Jesus would die the death we all deserved. But Jesus made clear to Peter just who was behind Peter's motive: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Of course, there were other things—surprising and miraculous things—which the disciples never looked for, never expected, but ended up seeing. For instance, they never expected their fishing nets to rip and tear from an overabundance of fish that Jesus had called to their catch. They didn't expect it, but they saw it. They didn't expect to see Jesus walking out to them across the water in the midst of a storm, but it happened, and they saw that, too. They didn't expect to see Jesus turn water into wine or cast out devils or heal lepers, give sight to a man born blind, or raise people from the dead. And, they never, ever expected to see their Master, the crucified and buried Jesus—his hands and feet pierced by nails and His side split by a spear – they never expected to see Him suddenly and physically up here in a room that had been locked and barred, but Jesus showed up and even ate some broiled fish right in front of them, and they saw it with their own eyes. They had been privileged to see Christ's active ministry from start to finish. They saw Him dead; they saw Him resurrected. And they saw Him again and again for 40 days after His resurrection.

Which takes us to the last time the disciples saw our Lord in this world. I say, "in this world" because the disciples, like all who believe in Jesus as Savior, saw the Lord again when they died and their spirit went to be with Him in paradise. In fact, John saw Jesus again in His glorified state on the Island of Patmos. But for most of them, the last time they would see Jesus in this world was on the mount of the Ascension. There Jesus instructed His disciples to go out into all the world, and to teach, preach, and baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. He told them that, in this divine expedition, they would not be alone. For he, by the Holy Spirit's power, would be with them always. And then Jesus was simply lifted up. He just went up and up until finally a cloud hid Him from their sight. I don't know how far He went up. I don't know locally where He ended up because I don't know where heaven is. But I do know he's

there at the right hand of the Father, but also here invisibly and everywhere—both God and Man for all eternity.

The disciples who had seen so many unexpected things over these last three years must have realized they were seeing something totally new. As Jesus ascended, they watched—and they kept watching as He went up. They kept watching as the cloud hid Him. They kept watching when there was nothing left to see. With necks bent and faces upturned, they kept watching.

Way back in the 1830s, there was a preacher by the name of William Miller. After making considerable calculations, Miller concluded that Jesus was going to return in March of 1842 or 1843. People were impressed by Miller's figures and some of them became His followers. But 1842 came and went and then came and went 1843. Jesus did NOT visibly show up. There was great disenchantment and disappointment amongst Miller's followers. Their disillusionment lasted until another man said God had told him that the first set of figures was wrong. Jesus was coming on October 22, 1844. As the date came near, followers and doubters found themselves looking frequently toward the heavens. People quit their positions. Farmers left their fields, and shopkeepers closed their stores. Hundreds clothed themselves in white robes. Some went to cemeteries where they could be present for the resurrection of their dearly departed. Others went to high hills where they would be among the first to see the Redeemer's return. October 22 arrived, but Jesus did not. They were left looking into the sky.

Standing around, endlessly looking into the sky is not what God wants His people to do. He didn't want it from the Millerites in 1844, and He doesn't want it for you now. He certainly didn't want it for His disciples. Do you remember a little while ago, we left the disciples still staring into the sky, watching the Savior's ascension? God did not leave them that way for very long. We're told that two men, that is, two angels appeared to the disciples and asked, "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 you saw Him go into heaven."

That reminded the disciples that Jesus had given them work to do. With rejoicing, they went back to Jerusalem. There they awaited the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the beginning of God's work of witnessing.

Remember what that Civil War nurse, Clara Barton, said to the Union officer who questioned her being near the battlefield. She said, "What am I doing? I'm looking for wounded! Looking for the wounded is what I do." Well, looking for wounded is one thing we should be doing too – that is, looking for anyone who has been wounded by Satan, sin, heartache, and

sorrow, and strewn about the battlefield of life. When God gives us the opportunity, we witness the healing love and forgiveness that we have in Jesus Christ.

Some years ago, 4,000 people were asked what first brought them to church. Two or three percent of them said they just walked in; and the same amount said they came because of the church's programs. Five to six percent were attracted by the preacher, and one to two percent came out of a special need they had. A similar percentage, one to two percent, said they had been reached by an evangelism program. Four to five percent came a because of a Sunday school class and Bible classes, while less than one percent were touched by a public evangelistic crusade.

Somewhere around 75% to 90% had been brought to the church through the influence of friends and relatives, who didn't just spend their days looking intently into the sky. Witness is what we Christians are called to do. We're not all evangelists; we're not all pastors and teachers. But we're all witnesses. "Ye shall be My witnesses," Jesus said. But even when we fail miserably in this, we're still washed in the water of Holy Baptism and forgiven by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is assured in Christ.

Amen.