

# “What Are You Looking At?”

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Based on Acts 1:6-14

Last Thursday was the Festival of the Ascension, being forty days after Easter Sunday. In case you didn't find time to celebrate this major festival of the Church Year, we are given the opportunity this day to bear witness to this transition, in which the Risen Lord ascends into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, as we confess in the Creed.

What strikes me most about the account of this event in the book of Acts isn't the majesty of the event, or even the words of Christ. It's the response to this event by the disciples, which technically should now be referred to as the apostles. How do they respond? With shouts of jubilation? With tears of sorrow and joy? By building an ebenezer?

No, they stand there, gazing up at the sky. It's so bad that God has to send angels down to snap them out of it. What catches my attention the most is that it seems to me that there's a lot of Christians who are still stuck staring up at the sky, in one way or another. Some are looking up at the sky, so focused on their relationship with God that they neglect their earthly relationships, perhaps with their spouse, or their children, or their friends. Others may be always staring up into the sky waiting for Jesus to come back, and so they wait, wait, wait, for it to happen, and it's all they can talk about. Some others are staring up at the sky, so focused on God, that they begin to fear or resent those who are outside of their Christian group and become inhospitable to the outsider, the outcast, or the stranger.

In any of these cases, the totally sky-focused Christian is out of touch with daily life and the people around them. On the other hand, there are those Christians who seemed to never look at the sky, never look up to God. In some cases, they get so caught up in the day to day operation of the congregation, such as budgets, personnel issues, and property concerns that they forget the faith element. In other cases, their faith simply withers on the vine, and other things become more important than living out the Gospel by using the gifts that God gave them to make a difference in the world.

This year, for Salem ACT, accept God's love, choose Christ's ways, and touch others lives, becomes ACTION, with the addition of ION, impact others now. But if we're going to impact others now, we need to keep an eye on those around us, those whom we know and love, and those we have just met, so that we can see their hopes and hurts, and identify ways in which we can use our gifts and talents to make a difference in their lives.

But if we're going to impact others now, we must do so with the Gospel, so we must keep our other eye on Christ, on his scars from the cross, and on the eastern sky, always hopeful that Christ will return soon to transform our world into the new heaven and the new earth as He has promised. In this balanced perspective our faith will empower our lives, and thus our lives will bring hope and healing to the world.

So thinking about your own lives, what are you looking at? Are you watching both the sky and the world around you? Are you looking to Christ and to the neighbor? If not, which one needs more focus from you? More focus on the people around you? Or perhaps more focus on Christ, on his word revealed in Scripture, in the promises he made to us? Or maybe even both?

Just keep in mind though, that we're talking about our discipleship, not our salvation. God saved us from our sins by the waters of baptism so that we can live balanced lives, so that we can impact others now with the Gospel, so that those who are still separated from the promise of baptism may be given new life.

So, people of Salem, as the season of Easter comes to an end, and we towards the season of Pentecost, keep an eye on the sky, and thus on our God above, and keep an eye on the people around you, and thus see the path that God desires for you to take. In Jesus name, Amen.