

Gazing into Heaven

[Acts 1:1-11](#)

There is a movie that came out recently about a football star who, toward the end of the movie, makes a daring catch in the end zone, only to be knocked unconscious. The trainers and assistants come rushing out onto the field and work to revive the star player. When he starts to come around, the player notices he is still holding the football. When the trainers try to get him to stand up, he says, “Wait, let me just enjoy this for a moment.” Of course he does get up, he is not hurt and literally basks in the moment of glory.

It seems this is what the disciples wanted to do in today’s scripture – they wanted to simply remain there, gazing into heaven. It seems similar to what we sometimes feel at the end of a really great event or party – we don’t want it to end. We just want to stay in that moment and reminisce. Anything after

that seems like a let-down. It just doesn't seem as special as that peak moment of joy. But then we do move on, somewhere down the line there is another great experience followed by another. When we keep looking forward, we can expect greater things to happen in our Christian walk.

The disciples were given instructions to stay together in Jerusalem because there is a special gift coming for them. Jesus recognized the power in the community and the importance of being together for the next step in the disciples' Christian journey - empowerment. During the time Jesus was on earth, Jesus pretty much took the lead and maintained central focus during his ministry. He did commission the disciples at times to go out and witness, heal the sick, and drive out demons, yet Jesus still remained as the predominant leader. All the time Jesus was with them, he was grooming them for leadership.

Jesus knew his time on earth was limited and in order for the message of God's love to continue to thrive, Jesus had to empower leaders to take over the mission on earth. Jesus would always remain as our central focus – let me make that clear.

Jesus was the catalyst. In any scientific/chemical reaction, there are the elements needed to make the reaction occur, than there is the spark or catalyst that initiates some event that drives the reaction. Jesus called the disciples to follow him and learn from his teachings serving as the catalyst. He knew he needed to provide them with the elements they would need in order to instill the passion needed to witness to the ends of the earth.

It is interesting to me that these 'elements' known as the disciples were more focused on dwelling in the moment than in continuing their mission. I cannot imagine the sight of seeing Jesus ascend into heaven in the clouds. I think I would want to

stand there gazing into the sky as well – maybe a bit in disbelief, maybe just in sheer awe of what they had witnessed. The scriptures note that by this time the disciples’ minds were opened and they fully understood the events of Jesus’ ministry, his passion, death, and resurrection. They finally understood that he was truly the son of God living among them. But to see first-hand how Jesus was transformed into his heavenly being and lifted into the heavens to return home could not have been anything less than awesome. It is understandable I think that they would want to bask in the moment. How often does something like that occur in one’s lifetime! Think of the special times in your lives – those truly pinnacle experiences of marriage, or graduation, or the birth of a child, or special anniversaries or family reunions. You think at that moment, ‘life doesn’t get any better than this!’ And yet it seems something down the road is just as special or even more so.

As we come up on our first year here at Mount Tabor, I find myself wanting to bask in the special moments we have had here. I thought I had hit the pinnacle of my pastoral career when I found myself preaching outside wearing a Hawaiian shirt and hiking a football at the end of the sermon! Anyone remember that? Then we rolled into Halloween complete with a coven of witches and disco music! From there it was onto Advent and Christmas Eve, complete with a Grinch in the church yard! We barely had time to breathe when we are diving into Lent and the Easter Season, and Youth Sunday along with many other special events. Each one seems to create a sense of awe as we realize all that we can do and all that we have done as a dedicated church congregation of Christ's followers.

I must point out that had we simply stopped our wonder and striving at that first Labor Day picnic celebration, we would

not be in the position we are now, continuing to seek ways to connect with our community and share God's awesome love. Small and mighty doesn't even begin to describe the power of this congregation as we continue to follow God's will for us. Yet we could easily find ourselves trapped in nostalgia as we want to bask in each moment of glory.

This is Ascension Sunday as we remember and reflect on Jesus' ascension back to heaven and what that means for us as empowered leaders of Christ's church. This is also Memorial Day weekend, where we pause and remember those that have served our country. Today it seems like we remember more with sales and picnics yet we do pause to reflect on the accomplishments we have made as a nation, and I will add one line from our Pledge of Allegiance, 'One Nation Under God.' Yet we see that as much as we want to pause and remember and

reflect on the victories of the past, we must keep looking forward to ‘what’s next?’ That question should always be in front of us – what’s next? Where do we go from here?

As a congregation of Christ’s believers here at Mount Tabor, what is next for us? Are we still wanting to stand gazing into heaven? It is very tempting – it feels as if we have accomplished a lot in less than a year together. I believe God wants us to continually pray for discernment in order to stay within God’s will for us. Things appeared pretty grim for this congregation for a while, yet within a relatively short time we have been rejuvenated and reinvigorated with a sense of purpose. Our community is seeing that we are an active and involved congregation. We are a part of our Jerusalem. We will continue to connect with our neighbors through community events and fun activities.

We can help folks realize that church can be fun – who knew? Real joy comes from God, even in the midst of difficult times. Community brings fellowship that many so desperately need in this area. God’s joy is infectious. It is like hearty laughter – you can’t seem to help but feel better in the presence of Almighty God. As members of Christ’s holy church in this community we are charged to go beyond our walls and witness the love of God to our neighbors in our Jerusalem of Etchison and beyond, into Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. As the song says, ‘It is Joy unspeakable and full of glory!’

I am sure the disciples may have felt a little lost at watching Jesus leave them and return to heaven. Yet within their confusion they are visited by two angels who remind them that Jesus will return and there is a promise of an advocate through the Holy Spirit to help them until that time. We are not alone. God is always with us even in what appears to be our darkest

hour. We need to continue to move forward as a congregation and continually discern God's will for us. Pray for this congregation – pray for its leaders and decision-makers that we will continue to seek God's will to help meet the needs of our community. Thanks be to God for the blessing bestowed upon us here at Mount Tabor. Amen.