

Sermon
Ascension Sunday
Sunday, June 1, 2025
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scott
Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 93; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53

“Up through the atmosphere
Up where the air is clear
Oh, let’s go fly a kite”

I wonder how many of you recognize these lyrics from the musical “Mary Poppins”?

Today we are celebrating Jesus’s Ascension – the feast for which this blessed place, this parish, is named. Ascension Day was this past Thursday, exactly 40 days after Easter Sunday

Along with our first hymn this morning, and Orlando Gibbons’ “O Clap Your Hands” (included in the newsletter) – the song “Let’s Go Fly a Kite” is part of the “soundtrack” of Ascension Day for me.

Why, you might ask? What does flying a kite have to do with these stories that Luke and Acts bring us? It’s the “up” of kite flying.

Ascension is, as Sam Wells says, the other half of Christmas. Jesus came down at Christmas to show us how much God loves us. At Christmas, we are the focus of God’s attention. At Ascension, Jesus goes back up to God, and draws us with him, into relationship with God, forever. In that relationship, our perspectives move from ourselves into something so much more...

Our Gospel passage today says very clearly that Jesus was carried up into heaven. In the passage we heard from Acts, the angels ask the disciples "...why do you stand looking UP toward heaven?" Almost as though they were flying a kite! ☺ I struggle with the idea of God "somewhere out there – somewhere up there" – with the idea of a three-story universe, heaven above, earth between and hell below, and I'm sure many of you do, too.

Our understanding of the cosmos now is very different than it was 2000+ years ago. There is a great story about a conversation between American Bishop John – "Jack" – Shelby Spong and cosmologist Carl Sagan about the Ascension. As they were speaking, Sagan did some math in his head, and said to Bishop Spong that even if Jesus' velocity had increased to the speed of light, he hasn't yet left our galaxy. He's somewhere in the Milky Way!

Jesus's Ascension is not about mechanics, or physics. It's not about location. It's about perspective.

There is much blessing in the "up" of Jesus's Ascension - in his rising, surrounded by a cloud of divine presence. The blessing is that this is an invitation for us to let our perspectives rise up and fly high. In acknowledging Jesus going "up" to God, our focus and perspective shifts from ourselves to look up, and around us.

Jesus was not to be a superstar or a superhero. He was not to be lone figure saving the world on his own. Jesus entered our time and space to show us how much we are loved, and to show us that it is with our hands and feet and hearts that the world will be saved – that the world will be restored. Jesus needed to physically leave for the gift of the Holy Spirit to be fully released to all people. Jesus needed to leave for us to recognize that the world will not be saved by the efforts of a lone superhero or superstar, but through a collective effort.

Those song lyrics again: Up in the atmosphere, up where the air is clear.

Up in the atmosphere. Up where the air is clear. Even though this is a lighthearted song, there is a transcendence, a mystical quality in this idea of rising up into the

atmosphere. There is a timelessness in that clear air. There is a timelessness in our faith – past, present and future, folding and unfolding...

Jesus made his earthly-self absent to make way for the presence of the Spirit. When we live “up”, when we live from a higher perspective, we transcend our own selves – our own self-interest – to embrace the well-being of all people, all places, all things – all of creation. When we let our perspectives ascend, we make our own self-interest absent to make way for the presence of the Spirit in our thinking, in our feeling, and in our actions.

Ascension Day reminds us of our call, as followers of Jesus, “go up”—to find higher ground—not to escape Earth's crises, but to gain a vision and mission that is larger than ourselves.

We are celebrating Ascension Sunday today, and this is also the Sunday when Anglicans across Canada are invited to observe Jerusalem and the Holy Land Sunday. This year, in acknowledgement of the horrific violence and suffering in Gaza, the Companions of the Diocese of Jerusalem offer the title “For Such a Time as This” instead. Materials and fundraising efforts this year focus on healing the children of Gaza. This speaks to a rising up in solidarity, to a rising up above a feeling of hopelessness in the face of violence and injustice, and to an acting in love.

Up in the atmosphere. Up where the air is clear. When we “let go” of our preconceptions and judgements, when we “let go” of self-centeredness, when we let our perspectives float high and far and wide, we move over and above the barriers and obstacles that hinder the movement of the Spirit in our lives.

In the passage from the Letter to the Ephesians we heard the wonderful verses: “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints.” The eyes of our hearts are not tethered too firmly to this earth. The eyes of our hearts rise

high, into the atmosphere, seeing beyond judgements and separation. The eyes of our hearts seek peace and connection.

When we let our perspectives ascend, we make our own self-interest absent to make way for the presence of the Spirit in our thinking, in our feeling, and in our actions. The “up” of Ascension, makes way for what comes next: the down, the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. Letting our perspectives rise up and fly high leaves us open to receive, and to live in and through that Spirit.

Downstairs right now, our children and youth are making kites. Perhaps when we move outside for our BBQ after the service, we’ll get to do some kite flying! I invite you to add “Let’s Go Fly a Kite” to your soundtrack for Ascension Day. Let it remind you of our call to look up and around.

We’ve done some wonderful work together on visioning in recent months. That visioning has had us look up and around. As we continue on from the collective dreaming we’ve done into the developing phase, we’ll need to move up into the atmosphere. We’ll need to let our perspectives look down from that perspective of a kite in the sky at this blessed place of Ascension, and at the neighbourhood and world around.

May our time here take us up. Up as we acknowledge Jesus, forever with God. Up into the transcendence and timelessness of our faith. May we leave here having felt our perspectives ascend up into the atmosphere. And may that clear air leave us open to the movement of the Spirit, today and always. In Jesus name. Amen.