

Reflection 17th May 2026

Jesus where are you?

Texts: Acts 1:6–14 and John 17:1–11

I remember as a child walking outside at night and looking up at the moon. I was with another child I can't remember if it was a friend or a sibling. But I remember staring so carefully at the moon that person said to me if you looked closely enough, you could see Jesus on the cross because that where Jesus lived.

I do not know whether anyone else was told that as a child, but I certainly was. To my young imagination, it seemed obvious. That was where Jesus lived. I didn't know anything about the ascension it was too much to be understood at that young age. But Jesus had somehow gone to heaven and somehow ended up in the moon so the moon and the heaven must be connected.

And perhaps that is one of the beautiful things about childhood faith. Children instinctively place the sacred somewhere visible. Somewhere they can point to. Somewhere they can imagine. The moon became heaven for me. A place where Jesus watched over the world at night while I slept.

Of course, as I grew older, my understanding of the universe changed. In school we learn about planets and galaxies, gravity and astronomy. Even though many biblical literalists do, many of us no longer imagine heaven as a physical location somewhere above the clouds or resting quietly inside the moon. And yet, even as adults, we still find ourselves looking upward. We still search for signs that we are not alone.

I remember being told the story of little girl who was afraid of the dark and she cried out to her mother in the middle of the night. Her mother came into her room and she said, I'm scared, I don't like the dark. Her mother responded that she would be ok because Jesus was with her to help keep her safe, even though we can't see him he is here beside you. The little girl replied, no don't want Jesus if I can't see him, I want someone with skin on.

Jesus is amongst us and yes he has skin on every time we become the face of Christ in the people we meet among us, those whom we encounter here at St. Andrew's, in our community in our families, in our world.

I'm not sure about you but I've always wondered what an ascension looks like. How realistic, or even how far-fetched, does the thought of Jesus simply rising into the heavens and disappearing come across to you?

For many modern people, the image can feel strange, even unbelievable. We live in an age of satellites, astronomy, and space exploration. I was in the Singapore Airport transit lounge when I watched the space crew from the Artemis splash down when they returned to earth on the 11th of April. Maybe for them they felt like they were definitely in the heavens that is the universe, but not the place where the bible talks about eternity. But for many others heaven is not literally "up there" above the clouds in the way ancient people once imagined the universe.

So when we hear the story of Jesus ascending heaven, we can become distracted by the mechanics of it. Did he levitate? Did he physically disappear into the sky? What exactly happened? Maybe the Ascension is not about geography at all but about transformation.

The people of the first century understood the cosmos differently from us. Their worldview imagined the heavens above, the earth beneath, and the underworld below. So when Luke describes Jesus being "lifted up," he is using the language and imagery available to communicate something profound: that Jesus was no longer bound by ordinary human limitations, and that the presence of Jesus would now be experienced in a new way. The Ascension is less about Jesus escaping the earth and more about the disciples learning to stop clinging to the physical presence of Jesus they once knew.

In Luke's retelling of this story here the disciples stand staring into the sky. And suddenly two figures appear and ask them, "Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" The disciples are frozen, gazing upward, perhaps hoping Jesus will come back immediately.

But the message for them here is do not remain stuck here. Do not become trapped in nostalgia.

Do not spend your life staring into the clouds while the world below is crying out for healing.

Because the story immediately turns them back toward Jerusalem. Back toward community.

So much of religion can become an exercise in looking upward while ignoring what is happening around us. I've never attempted to use that pulpit to my right; I wonder what it would be like to have you all looking upward to me. Shall we try it? This was built in the days and time where the higher we are the closer to God we are. The majestic Jesus who sits on a throne high above, untouchable. Can anyone here tell me who was the first minister here who stopped using this pulpit? When did that happen?

If we wait for supernatural rescue in a faraway God, injustice continues to grow. If we long for heaven we fear neglecting the earth. In our search for miracles we might overlook the sacredness already present in ordinary acts of love. When we pray "may your kingdom/realm come on earth as it is in heaven we shouldn't be waiting to die to get to that kingdom place. May your kingdom come on earth "as it is in heaven" means that we are to make this place, this world we live in a place where heavenly ideals of justice and peace and love prevail. Not when we die, but now, today in the here and now.

But in the book of Acts, the disciples are sent back into the world to witness within it. And the Greek word for witness is *martyr*, from which we get the word martyr. It does not mean forcing beliefs onto others. It means embodying truth, even at cost. To be a witness to Christ is to embody compassion in a cruel world. To embody generosity in an anxious world. To embody justice in an unjust world. To embody peace in a violent world.

One of the most beautiful lines in this passage comes at the very end: "All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus."

They waited together. They prayed together. Men and women together. The frightened and the faithful together. The hopeful and the uncertain together. This tiny community waiting in an upstairs room would eventually become the early church through shared vulnerability and shared hope.

In progressive theology, the Ascension does not require us to suspend our intellect in order to believe in a three-tiered universe. Rather, it invites us into the mystery that the life and spirit of Jesus cannot be contained by death, empire, time, or even physical presence. The Jesus who once walked beside the disciples is now encountered everywhere: in communities of resistance, in movements for justice, in shared bread and wine, in the courage of the oppressed, in the tears of the grieving, and in the stubborn hope that love will have the final word.

Perhaps Ascension means that Jesus is no longer located in one body, in one place, in one nation, or in one moment of history. If we want Jesus with skin on then perhaps Ascension remind us that Jesus is universal, present wherever human beings embody compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and peace.

And maybe the real miracle is not that Jesus rose into heaven. Maybe the real miracle is that frightened disciples, abandoned and uncertain, eventually found the courage to stop staring upward and begin transforming the world below.

And for us that is the invitation of this Sunday. To stop waiting passively for heaven. To become participants in God's healing of the earth. To embody Jesus here and now with skin on. And to trust that even in uncertain times, the Spirit is still moving among us. Amen.