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Easter 7, May 10, 2024 –

“Power points of life - The Power to Look Up”

Read Luke 24: 44 – 53 and/or memorize Luke 24: 45 NLT

The story is told of a man who lived in a shack at the edge of town. He wore overalls to church, before casual dress was cool. He didn't own a car; he didn't have a job. For a 16-year-old kid, fresh from the DMV with his driver's license, it became his privilege to drive Porter home from church each Sunday.

He would pull into Porter's driveway. Porter would get out of the car, and then, as if it were an afterthought, although he never failed to do it, Porter would peak back into the car and say, "Keep looking up, Bubby, keep looking up. That's how this young man got his nickname, “Bubby.” However, it's the message that he wants to claim: "Keep looking up. Keep looking up.”

The ancient Greeks invented the marathon. People would come together from all over the land to run a race that remembered a young man who had run to report a victory, and then promptly fell dead according to legend. Thinking of the Christian life as a marathon, the author of Hebrew writes, "Laying aside everything that hinders us, and the sin that so easily entangles us, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" in essence, expressing our theme for today, "look up to Jesus.”

We are at the seventh Sunday of Easter, the last weekend of our Easter celebration. But this Easter day is a little different than all the previous ones. The Pascal candle, signifying the presence of Jesus, has been moved from its position of honor on the gospel side of the altar, back to the floor of the nave and it's unlit. Why is that?

Well, on Thursday, the church-at-large, celebrated the Ascension of our Lord. So, although we are still technically in the season of Easter, our Lord is no longer with us on earth. He has ascended to heaven, where he sits at the right hand of God.

In just about two weeks, many will be gathering with family and friends on Memorial Day. For most Americans, Memorial Day is just a fun day in the sun, at least they hope it is. But some will use that day to look back. They might place flowers in memory of loved ones, who have served our country. Perhaps, they'll share stories of those loved ones; even shed a tear. Memory is God's way of keeping those who have gone before us, with us. There are times when it is wise to look back.

We are also living at a time when we need to look out. If you were in Gaza, you'd be looking out for the dangers of an airstrike or some other weapon. You might want to look out for those who seek to push our country into chaos. Let us pray for all those who need to look out to be safe.

Rather than looking back; more than looking out, look up, all the way to Jesus. He is the author of our salvation and the perfecter of our faith. When we don't know where we're going, He is the way. When we are wondering in whom to believe, He is the truth. When we doubt that we can survive, He is the life.

Here is part of the mystery of the Gospel: Jesus goes before us while He walks beside us. He blazes the trail and orders our steps. For us people, who are wrapped up in time, it is hard for us to understand it. If that is the truth of the Gospel, He is both before us and with us. He was taken up into heaven, but He is always with us, even to the end of the ages.

So, look up today, not to the mountains, not to runners competing in the races that might be run. Look up to Jesus, who knows that you look up and will encourage you every step of the way. Keep looking up to Jesus.

We're told by Luke that, in the closing days of Jesus' time with the disciples, He "opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures." Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, continues to open our minds and hearts to understand His Word.

The Word of God continues to suffer at the hands of people. They buy His book, but seldom read it. They read it, but misinterpret it. People challenge it to profit from it. People, who take such positions, have little interest in the Word. We can be certain of that because the Word warns us of it, and we've always believed it. .

Here are some statements that many people believe come from the Bible.

1. Cleanliness is next to godliness.
2. God helps those who help themselves.
3. Confession is good for the soul.
4. Money is the root of all evil.
5. Honesty is the best policy.

None of them is in the Bible, but because so many people say them, we think that they must be. That's why it's important for each of us to be a student of the Word, so we recognize when someone is saying something that is not in that Word.

I cannot think of a pastor who's been in ministry for any number of years, who has not had this experience. A person comes into their office one day and says that they are leaving the church. They disagreed with something they said in the sermon the prior weekend. They'll tell them that they have totally misunderstood scripture because they have an understanding of it that is different than theirs. Sometimes, you just have to write it off. Once someone has made that decision to leave, you can rarely talk them out of it.

We are finding this in some of the pastors we interview. One of the areas where we are distinct is how women serve in our congregation. They have different understandings of how women can function in the church. This verse often comes up in these kinds of conversations. In one place, Paul said that "women should be silent in the church." While yet, in another place, he says that those clothed in Christ are "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ." You might ask the question, which is it?

It is not that either of us are unfaithful to scripture. Rather, we have a difference of opinion of how one interprets it. People of good faith can accommodate to that. It is not an issue of salvation. It is an issue of order in the church. We have a tendency to quote our favorite passages and ignore the passages that we don't agree with.

As our gospel said, "Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures." Lord, how we need that to be done! We talked about the Da Vinci Code a couple of weeks ago, but that is only one of many books that have picked up on the first or second century heresies, dressed up in new cloth, that have plagued the church for 2000 years. Part of the problem is we don't know scripture very well. Jesus wants to open our minds to the Bible, but many times we prefer to keep it closed.

The Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds are the outgrowth of the church dealing with heresy. The church took what was said in the Bible, put it down in a simple fashion that people could remember and hold onto. The devil loves for us to struggle with false teaching, it distracts us from what he's seeking to accomplish.

Here's a good idea to remember: read novels for entertainment. Read the Bible for instruction in the way of life. Here are some things to help you: the Bible contains all things necessary for salvation. The Bible is amazingly accurate in matters unrelated to faith. The Bible has endured the test of time and the skepticism of people. The Bible is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

In Luke 24: 50 we hear: "and while He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up to heaven." Of all the doctrines concerning the Christ, the Ascension represents one of our greatest struggles. We wonder, why didn't Jesus clean up the messes of the world before He left? What was He thinking when He left it all up to us? If Jesus had stayed on earth, He could've answered our

questions, solved our doubts, mediated our disputes of doctrine. Instead, He disappears into the clouds. How odd of God to do something like that.

The disciples didn't seem to have a problem with that. In the next verse it says, "then they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple praising God." They stayed in Jerusalem, the very place that they had feared to be, but in that place of failure, the place of doubt and the place of disappointment, they remained. We know why they did that: Jesus told them to stay there. The disciples finally figured out that when the Lord asked them to do something, they should do it.

So often, when we get into problems, we think the easiest thing is to just move on; maybe even run away. Yet in a marriage, on a job and for the church, Jesus said to "stay in Jerusalem." Perhaps, in simple words, it means: bloom where you're planted. It wasn't perfect in Jerusalem, but it won't be perfect beyond Jerusalem.

What are we called to do? We are called to do the work of ministry. We don't directly know why Jesus left it all to us, but I have an idea. He left it to us to have the joy of carrying it out. When I graduated from the seminary the model I learned was the pastor did the ministry. Your job was to support me. What I learned is that you were called to do ministry.

One of the most difficult things I had to learn in my years of ministry was how to give ministry away to the people. I don't always do it very well, and I apologize when I fail, but I believe Jesus left the ministry to all of us because that was his plan. No one person can carry it out. Who am I to question God? And rather than spending our time, pondering that, let's remember that there are strangers to welcome, souls to save, prisons to visit and sick to heal. There are the poor to help and the widows to serve.

"Lord, you give your great commission:
Heal the sick and preach the Word.
Lest the church neglect its mission,
And the gospel go unheard.

Keep looking up; looking up to Jesus. Study the scriptures; serve the world

Count me in: As you look up to Jesus, how will you look for those who need to know Him?