

Easter 7b: Sunday after Ascension 5/16/21
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*“Seek the things that are above, where Christ is,
 seated at the right hand of God.”*

That’s the line of Scripture that comes to mind whenever
 I think of the Ascension.

It’s from a favorite passage of the New Testament book Colossians, chapter 3.

*“Seek the things that are above, where Christ is,
 seated at the right hand of God.”*

A good thought for the Sunday after the Ascension, right?

The only thing, it’s not one of the appointed readings we just heard.

Oh, I appreciate that story from Acts about the disciples picking up the pieces
 after Judas’ betrayal.

I adore that passage of John’s Gospel from what’s known as Jesus’ “Farewell Discourse”.
 But when it comes to the Ascension, I think Colossians.

The Ascension of course is the feast day late in Eastertide which sets the stage for
 receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit next week at Pentecost.

On Ascension we commemorate Jesus ascending into heaven.

But it’s not about Jesus leaving anyone stranded.

It’s about Jesus taking us with him.

Jesus ascends into heaven thus filling all the earth with his splendor.

Jesus ascends into heaven to transcend the limitations of time and space
 and convention.

In Christ’s ascension, we too ascend and are transformed.

“In that renewal”, it says in Colossians, “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and
 uncircumcised...slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!”

I wish I could say that I had these ideas in mind several weeks ago when
 we decided to commission members of our Resolution 7 Task Force today.

In fact, we just threw a dart at the calendar.

But it turns out that the Ascension has a lot to say about the work of this important new group.

You know that expression – the “view from 30,000 feet”?

That’s the cruising altitude of an airplane.

It means getting enough perspective to see a fuller picture.

I remember looking out the airplane window

the first time I flew out of Chuck Yeager Airport in Charleston, WV,
 where I’d lived most of my life.

It wasn’t until I *ascended* to 30,000 feet that I could see it all at once.

How different parts of town fit in together.
 The system of roads and rivers I'd taken for granted.
 I saw things, from above, that I hardly noticed, from below.
 And when I landed safely back home, I had a new appreciation of all those familiar sights.

“Seek the things that are above . . .”

Here's how Eugene Peterson in The Message Bible puts that passage from Colossians into context: “So if you're serious about living...new...life with Christ, *act* like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground...Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ – that's where the action is. See things from *his* perspective.”

That's good advice for any of us.
 Perhaps particularly so for the Resolution 7 Task Force we commission today.
 You can read the whole resolution for yourself (it's included in the bulletin).
 This resolution was passed at the most recent Annual Convention of the Episcopal Church in CT, and our delegate Maryellen Connell mentioned it in her sermon last fall and report to the Vestry. She and I voted in favor of it at Convention, and I (along with many others, including our former seminarian Shancia Jarrett) signed on to submit it to Convention.

In short, Resolution 7 calls us as Episcopalian Christians in CT to commit to social and racial justice as core values, rooted in the Gospel, central to furthering God's mission. It contains specific steps – from anti-racism training to hiring dedicated staff on the diocesan level-- that we will take as the Episcopal Church in CT. Each parish is charged with discovering and documenting their historic complicity in racism. It is to the vital ministry of discovering and documenting this history that we commission members of our Resolution 7 Task Force.

This work is just beginning. We don't know what we'll find.
 But here's something we do know:
 We will faithfully and prayerfully pursue this research wherever it leads, and we ask for your prayers and goodwill along the way.

We are one of the older parishes in CT, founded in 1741.
 We were around for 107 years before slavery was abolished in CT.
 Our parish history mentions by name at least two persons – Grace and Essau – who were enslaved by one of our early families.
 It seems highly likely that there are more stories like this yet to be told.
 We will do everything in our power to handle these stories with the tender loving care they deserve.
 As promised in our Baptismal Covenant,
 we will *respect the dignity of every human being* --
 not only those whose stories come to us through history,
 but any descendants who may still be in the area today.

Again, from the Baptismal Covenant, we will *seek and serve Christ in all persons*.

We will periodically share our findings with the congregation.

Please be patient as we are committed to doing this diligently, thoroughly and carefully.

We're aware that the Wallingford 350th Jubilee celebration has embarked on a similar effort called "Black Stories Matter" and will be coordinating with them as appropriate.

In all of this, we "seek the things that are above where Christ is".

By taking a 30,000 foot view of our parish history, we'll see things we've not seen before.

Perhaps things we'd rather not see.

But I want to believe that we as a parish are serious

about living new life with Christ, as Eugene Peterson says, and willing to *act like it*.

And so today, this Sunday after the Ascension,

we charge not only Resolution 7 Task Force members,

but each of us:

"Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ – that's where the action is.

See things from [Christ's] perspective."

AMEN.