

Looking up is easier (Acts 1:1-11; Luke 24:44-53)

It is tempting to look to the heavens rather than face the reality of the world.

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Why do you stand here looking into the sky? A few weeks ago I woke my family before dawn to try to catch a glimpse of the “blood moon” lunar eclipse. A few weeks before that, we’d strained our eyes through a plane window to catch the slightest glimmer of the northern lights pirouetting through unexpected skies. We moved back south this year, so a few weeks before that, on a visit to New England, my northern-born youngest child stuck her tongue out to catch snowflakes as if it were her very first time. She was filled with adoration, and when I asked her what she loved most about the snow, she replied, “Mommy, it is like all the stars falling from the sky.”

Looking to “the heavens” has long been a thing of wonder and beauty, but recently I can’t help but look to the sky with sadness. We sing “The Star-Spangled Banner” as if a rocket’s glare is a thing of beauty; we are not (yet) the ones experiencing the unending terror of seeing one’s sky filled with drones and bullets and missiles. I can’t escape the images of leaflets falling from the sky, cold and callous heralds of coming violence, incitements of insecurity and fear. The absurdities of such an analogue tactic in an AI weaponized world, the abuse of information to justify multiple horrors—*have they not heard?*—become a justification for every civilian injustice. I can’t help thinking the leaflets, too, look like they could be snow.

The text in Acts picks up where the Gospel of Luke leaves off, reminding us how Jesus leaves at the beginning of the story of how we ought yet to live. Christ is risen, risen indeed, and the Holy Spirit is on the way. A cloud comes and Jesus is departing, and *while he was going* they are adjusted by two presumable angels. *Why do you stand here looking into the sky?* This isn’t a question about adoration so much as one about displacement. It is far easier to look to the heavens than it is to face the reality of the world we have, far easier to hope for the next rather than be the hands and feet of Christ in the now. Far easier to await Christ’s coming again in blissful ignorance than to work to bring blessedness into a broken world—and, of course, to recognize one’s complicity in the suffering of others.

It is easy, even tempting, to spend one’s efforts wrapped in rapture predictions and Revelation metaphors. But look at our world, our country, our neighbors, ourselves. Why is it so hard to love? I wonder if this is where we miss Jesus—turning away from the faces of those who are hungry, thirsty, imprisoned. Grappling with our desensitization to those named illegal, trafficked, sympathizers. And as I think of my child looking up at the sky, eyes vibrant with the magic she still sees in the world, I wonder about the way the killing of children—whether by school shooting or school bombing—has become the narrative arc of our time.

If Christ has come, if Christ has risen, we should perhaps be not just looking but insisting we see him in the faces of each other. Just because Jesus ascends does not mean Jesus is not here. And when Christ does come again, I hold out to the promise of a sky that is no longer filled with terror but the coronation of all creation, where even the stars fall at Christ's feet. If we believe this, as the angels have asked, then the question is, what are we paying attention to?