
Why Are You Standing and Looking?

A sermon by Canon Wallace Marsh
Ascension Day – Year C

While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?"

Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? Why do the men in white robes pose this question?

On one level the answer should be obvious. Most of us don't venture out on our daily commutes and stumble upon someone ascending into heaven. Of course, they are going to stand and look to heaven and admire the theatricality of the event.

I think the men in white robes saw something else on the faces of those watching Jesus ascend. They must have seen faces filled confusion and fear.

They must have seen faces with the expression—What do we do now? Where do we go? Who is going to help us? How will we function without Jesus?

So, the men in white robes pose an important question—Why are you standing and looking?

Perhaps that question isn't just their question, but ours as well—Why are you standing and looking? And if we aren't supposed to be standing and looking, what should we be doing?

Ironically, on this Mother's Day, that question and this passage from Acts make me think of my mother.

Many years ago Mom and Dad were a young couple, pouring what little money they had into hours of swimming lessons so I could learn how to swim.

Weeks went by and checks were written. A few more weeks went by, and more checks were written, and every child seemed to be swimming but me.

And then the day came, when the line item for swimming lessons started cutting into the beer and wine budget. Something had to give.

My friends were playing games and jumping off the diving board in the deep end.

I, on the other hand, was content wearing water wings and holding onto the side of the pool. I had become fast friends with some of the older ladies doing water aerobics in the shallow end.

My mother said, "Son, why do you stand there looking at your friends in the deep end, it's time to get out there and swim."

Nothing seemed to work until the day when my mother lost her cool.

It was late evening, about 20 minutes before the pool closed. Everyone had left but the lifeguard, who happened to be a

babysitter and someone who attended our church.

Mom went up to the lifeguard and said, you know that I love my children more than anything and would never harm them.

The lifeguard said, of course you do. Mom said, what I am about to do next is going to be scary, but Wallace has got to stop standing in the shallow end and start swimming.

A few minutes later mom took me on a special swim. We were having a ton of fun; she was throwing me up in the air and I was soaking up the attention, until she accidently threw me out instead of up.

However, it turned out to be no accident. As I turned around to find her in the water, I noticed mom swimming away. I couldn't believe my eyes as I watched her swim to the side of the pool.

I was bobbing in the water, screaming and crying at the top of my lungs. I gazed up at the lifeguard sitting in the stand, who from my drowning vantage point appeared to be suspended in the clouds, like the ascending Jesus.

I desperately reached for the sky and called out for help. The lifeguard looked down and said, "Wallace, I have taught you everything you need to know, now it's time for you to kick and swim."

After what felt like minutes of screaming and crying, something clicked internally and I swam to the side of the pool, only to be greeted by cheers and ice cream.

For years, I have told mom that was the maddest I have ever been at her.

Yet, I couldn't be more grateful for what she did that afternoon, because there have been many occasions in life where I have been stuck standing and looking, and she loved me enough to show me there was more to life than standing and looking.

The men in white robes ask the crowd why they are standing and looking, but they do not tell them what to do next or where to go.

So, what happens next? Well, in Acts 2 the people receive the Holy Spirit, and that Spirit throws them into the deep waters of baptism.

In the second chapter of Acts, we learn that after the people of God are baptized, the Spirit calls them to form a special community, and the word used for that community in Acts 2 is *koinonia*.

Yes, the Holy Spirit throws those who are standing and looking into a community of faith, devoted to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

As Christians, we know that Christ calls us to go and live lives of faith. Time and time again, he says, "go, your faith has made you well." That is not an invitation to stand and look.

The men in white robes pose an important question for us today: Are you standing and looking or will you let the Holy Spirit throw you deeper into the waters of baptism and deeper into a community grounded in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. For it is there we are united with the Holy and Living God.