

***Matthew 28:20 Surely I am with you  
always, to the very end of the age.***

It was the musical group 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension who, back in 1967, recorded and released a single and album of the same title – Jimmy Webb’s classic hit - *Up, Up, and Away*. © Since I wasn’t born until 1972 and have very little recollection of anything before 1975, I’m going to go out on a limb here and assume that hot air ballooning in the late 60’s was a bit of a fad. For those who don’t know, the signature phrase from the song is, *Up, Up, and away in my beautiful balloon*.

Now I have to admit, as one whose first task of getting on a plane is to locate the nearest vomit bag, going up, up and away in a floating gas bag doesn’t hold a whole lot of appeal. But I can understand the attraction for some. It’s kind of like the group of folks that will gather at State Fair next month to look at how cars and driving *used to be* in earlier days. In a similar way, the first human flight took place by balloon and people are interested in what it was like to travel up, up, and away.

The bible doesn’t tell us just what was on the minds of the disciples, staring gape-mouthed up into the sky, as their Lord and Savior appeared to be flying up, up, and away. Human flight had never been witnessed before. It was mostly envying the birds to that point. For us who have witnessed flight into space, we might be a little more calloused to human flight today, but for them, this was astonishing on so many levels. Another human in flight wouldn’t be witnessed for another 1750 years!

But as we’ll see today, we can take confidence in the fact that Jesus wasn’t flying up, up, and away as it appeared. © Oh no, he was flying up, up, and *around*. For he clearly promised: ***Surely, I am with you always, to the end of the age***. No, Jesus has not disappeared from our side, just our sight. And as we consider his eternal promise of presence, please...

The year was 1783, © on October 15, a balloon called *Aerostat Reveillon*, launched in France and carried scientist Jean-François Pilâtre De Rozier to the end of its 250-foot tether. It stayed aloft for 15 minutes and then landed safely nearby. A month later, De Rozier and a companion (some name I can’t pronounce) flew untethered to 500 feet and traveled about five and a half miles in a 20-minute flight—the first "free flight" made by man.

In many ways, we are fascinated by flight. Probably as long as birds have been flying, human beings have longed to soar through the sky. Even the Scriptures speak in such terms. You might know the example from the prophet Isaiah and beautifully set to music in Michael Joncas’ well-loved hymn, ***Those who wait for the LORD will receive new strength. They will lift up their wings and soar like eagles.*** (40:31)

Over the years, © human flight has been envisioned by the Greeks, engineered by DaVinci, and accomplished by De Rozier, later the Wright brothers, and many others as well. We’ve even accomplished flying beyond the earth’s gravitational pull.

But the problem with human flight is that there are © two principles that we just can’t get around: 1) © What goes up...; and 2) © exceptions to the first, have always ended in disaster.

Though from a different perspective, the disciples gathered on the mount that day, seeing Jesus going up and up, had the same sinking feeling. It wasn’t that Jesus hadn’t given them assurances and promises. He had. But in their finite minds, they didn’t fully understand yet. Some of them still thought that Jesus was going to establish an earthly kingdom, and now here he was going away from them. Others may have had a better understanding, but still, so much more could be accomplished if Jesus were to stay, not go. And still others were awed by what they saw – human flight – but what was up with the future Jesus had talked about? How would the gospel go out to the ends of the earth without Jesus’ direction? How could they talk about their Lord, risen from the dead, if they couldn’t point to him in flesh

and blood? What if there were questions that they couldn't answer? There was no Jesus to go and ask!

Though you may not have looked at it from the same perspective, I think that sometimes we have that same concept in mind: What goes up, must come down. Think of it: How often haven't we questioned God after being lifted up by his promises, only to come crashing back to earth when he doesn't deliver in the way we want him to.

Or how often haven't we tempered our happiness, because we think that life is going too well. Let's not get too excited. It's all going to come crashing down any way.

Or it seems like many of the up's of life lead to hardship and heartache: bills are piling up, inflation is up, blood pressure is up, anxiety is up, temptation is up, anger, frustration and fear are all up! What's up with that! Where's Jesus in all of this?

And that's where we join the 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension. We think of Jesus going up, up and *away* as if he riding off in his beautiful balloon while the rest of us are left to fend for ourselves.

Oh, and it isn't as if Jesus hasn't been clear with his assurances and promises. He has. But like the disciples, we have our own way of looking at life, from our own perspective, usually from the bottom up.

So let's turn that around today. ☺ Let's look at life from God's perspective. Once again, let me remind you that as Jesus mounted his throne to shouts of joy, as he ascended to the heights of heaven, our all-present Savior has *never left*. He went up and up, but he is still around. ☺ As we heard in the Verse of the Day: ***Surely I am with you always.***

That's a promise from our loving Savior, a promise inked in blood, a promise given and shed for you, a promise backed by the throne of heaven, a promise placed in your hand at baptism, reaffirmed throughout your life, and made good as you cross over from death to life.

There is no up, up, and *away* for Jesus. He is around us always and in us even now. So that we need not worry about the up's and downs of life. We need not ask

what's up with all that's going on in life right now. You have his Word to answer your questions. You have a mounted warrior fighting your battles. You have his body and blood to strengthen you when you are weak. You have his blessings upon you. You have his light to guide you. You have his presence to shelter you. You have his peace to unite you.

So don't just stand there looking into the sky. What goes up must come down in true in one very special and divine way:

***This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. And so, [May] the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know the hope to which he has called you, just how rich his glorious inheritance among the saints.*** And in the meantime, as we too continue to receive the precious gift of his Holy Spirit, I invite you to once again join me in the Prayer of the Day. This prayer, along with the Hymn of the Day, written by 8<sup>th</sup> century monk and historian the Venerable Bede:

*Lord Jesus, King of glory, on this day you ascended far above the heavens and at God's right hand you rule the nations. Leave us not alone, we pray, but grant us the Spirit of truth that at your command and by your power we may be your witnesses in all the world; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*