



Look Around
Acts 1:6-14
Mary 17, 2026

Rev. Ann Palmerton
Broad Street Presbyterian Church
Columbus, Ohio

These days, you can place a bet on almost anything. There are online prediction markets for the existence of aliens, celebrity breakups, military actions, and whether certain cities will hit record temperatures.

So maybe it shouldn't come as a surprise that you can also place bets on the second coming of Jesus. I'm not kidding. One online prediction market currently gives Christ's return a 2% chance by the end of 2026. Any takers?

Today's scripture reading from Acts is about one of the most overlooked days on the church calendar: the Ascension of the Lord. This past Thursday was Ascension Day.

Unlike Christmas or Easter, Ascension Day doesn't come with candy or inflatable lawn decorations. Hallmark hasn't found much success with "Happy Ascension Day" cards, although I did find a custom card online! There are no Ascension Day sales. No chocolate clouds.

And yet this strange, easily forgotten holy day marks a turning point in the life of the church. Christian tradition says that after Easter, for forty days, Jesus appeared to the disciples: on the road to Emmaus, through locked doors, at tables and shorelines. Present, then gone. Familiar, yet changed. During those days, the disciples began to understand that Jesus, the Christ, was no longer bound by old ways of being. The Ascension marks the end of those appearances. It's his farewell.

Medieval and Renaissance artists often painted the Ascension with Jesus' feet disappearing into the clouds. The disciples stand below, faces tilted upward, watching him go. The Bible makes clear that the question facing the disciples is not, "When is Jesus coming back?" but "What now?" Our Lord's final words in Acts are not about dates or timelines. They are about purpose: "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

Still today, people are tempted to speculate about the second coming, just as the disciples are tempted to keep staring upward. But they are redirected: "Why do you stand looking up toward heaven?" In other words: Don't stay frozen there. Look around. Jesus' work of love, justice and healing continues, and now you are part of it.

The body of Jesus leaves their sight so the Body of Christ - the church - can be born. Ascension frees the disciples to become witnesses, Christ-bearers in the world. That is the promise of Ascension: Christ no longer stands in one particular place or time, because now, in glory, Christ is present everywhere, in all times and in all places, in our past, our present, and our future.

Rather than looking up, let's look around to find Christ in our world. On youth trips, we often ask, "Where did you see God today?" Broad Street youth remind us that the sacred appears in the beauty of nature, around shared tables, in friendship, laughter, and play. They glimpse Christ in strangers who need compassion and care. And through the arts they encounter holy wonder and creativity.

Today we invite you to experience Christ's presence through music as we hear the Columbus premiere of *An American Hymn Requiem*. Traditionally, a requiem is shaped by grief and remembrance, offering prayers for rest and peace and eternal life. Kelly Hale wrote this requiem in memory of his father.

By grace, through the power of music, God meets us, again. The Holy is not far away, but near - in beauty, memory, sorrow, hope, and community. Rather than standing still and staring upward, let's look around, let's listen deeply. Let's receive the invitation of Ascension, to see Christ alive in one another and in the world God loves. Amen.