

#28 10-11

Letting Go and Being

Psalm 47

Ephesians 1:15-23

Luke 24:44-53

Acts 1:1-11

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning 2until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; 5for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

The family had always been cared for by the mother. She woke them up in the morning, breakfast was waiting and lunch bags for the children were filled. She sent them off to the school bus and to work with a kiss. They came home to another kiss, a snack, she has picked up their rooms and cleaned the house, and they smell the beginnings of dinner being prepared. She asks them about their day, helps the children with their homework, feeds them, makes sure they get their baths, their drawers are full of clean clothes for the next day and they go to sleep with an embrace, a prayer and another kiss.

Then one day the unthinkable happened, the mother discovered she would have to go to away and was to stay away for an extended time. She had 40 days to prepare and teach her family all that they needed to know. She did her best at teaching them before she left, but sometimes things just take a little time. After she left they were late to school and work for a while; they wore wrinkled and sometimes dirty clothes. Their diets left much to be desired, their health started to deteriorate and they were overtired and stressed. But then they started to figure out how to live their lives in a different way, fitting in all that they needed to have done, that she normally did, what she taught them – and they did it by themselves.

They are now searching for new ways to fill in the void that she had left, and are becoming confident in their abilities to overcome what had seemed at first to be monumental. They are learning a great deal about laundry, cooking, cleaning, cooperation, the necessity for a good night's sleep, making wise choices for themselves, and how to love and care for each other.

And I leave this family there. The mother has not returned yet to the home, and the family is figuring out how to do it for themselves . . .

I leave them there because that is where we are left in our scripture for today: The Ascension of Christ!

The family witnessed practically every day of their lives how the Mother made their lives easier, yet they never really took on the responsibility to do it themselves until they were forced to, because she was there to do it for them. The Disciples witnessed and even had a chance to practice some of what Jesus had been living and doing around them, and yet, they were not going to be able to inherit the full power of his gifts until they were no longer focusing on Jesus – but were able to begin to use the God that is within each of them – and is within each of us.

It is through Jesus having touched the earthly lives of those who believed in him, that they receive a connection to the divine. If Jesus had not ascended into heaven and just remained on this earth and his body decayed – there would not be the clear understanding that the path to the holy is through faith in his teachings, to his holiness not to his humanness; that his is a connection that transcends all human understandings.

His teachings are such that while we live we can grow into them and there is no final class of his teachings where everyone gets a diploma and parties, unless we consider that is what happens at the time death - that we lose our bodies as well and are free to join him in heaven. His is a path to eternal oneness with God and therefore that mystical path does not end on this earth, as his essence did not.

Now, it is a bit problematic if we think of our awareness of the heavens and earth as we understand it in the 21st century, in contrast to 1st century AD. I remember wondering when I was younger if maybe Jesus was on the Enterprise and Scotty just beamed him up!

But regardless of the physical understandings, we have inherited from those who came before us - and we continue to live out for those who will follow us - a physical reality; that those of faith in Christ are called to be Christ on this earth in his stead – because he is no longer here. He “Ascended into heaven to sit on the right hand of God the Father almighty,” as they say in the Creeds.

And yet, because we are part of him and he in us, we get our inspiration, our faith and guidance from where he is now. We share in part his divinity.

St. Augustine considered the Feast of the Ascension the crown of all Christian festivals. He wrote, “Today our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven; let our hearts ascend with him. Listen to the words of the Apostle: *If you have risen with Christ, set your hearts on the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God; seek the things that are above, not the things that are on earth.* For just as he remained with us even after his ascension, so we too are already in heaven with him, even though what is promised us has not yet been fulfilled in our bodies. Christ is now exalted above the heavens, but he still suffers on earth all the pain that we, the members of his body, have to bear . . . While in heaven he is also with us; and we while on earth are with him. He is here with us by his divinity, his power and his love. Out of compassion for us he descended from heaven, and although he ascended alone, we also ascend, because we are in him by grace. Thus, no one but Christ descended and no one but Christ ascended; not because there is no distinction between the head and the body, but because the body as a unity cannot be separated from the head.”

So the Ascension is seen as something more than the metaphysical leaving of this earth. It is a vital spiritual connection between God, Christ and those who follow Christ. It is not only our calling to be Christ on this earth in his stead, but also to receive the holiness that comes from this shared experience. We have inherited Holiness – because that is where our Lord is – he is living in holiness, and we are a part of him.

Famous mystic writer and monk, Thomas Merton, was ordained as a Roman Catholic Priest on Ascension Thursday May 26, 1949 and he performed his first Mass the next day. He had this to say about the Ascension: [it] is the feast of silence and interior solitude when we go up to live in heaven with Jesus: for he takes us there, after he has lived a little while on earth among us. This is the grace of Ascension Day: to be taken up into the heaven of our own souls, the point of immediate contact with God. To rest on this quiet peak, in the darkness that surrounds God. To live there through all trials and all business with the “tranquil God who makes all things tranquil.”

May we be brought there this day and as many days as possible through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen