

SERMON: 2018/05/10 (Ascension Day, Year B) - Acts 1:6-11; Ephesians 1:15-23; Psalm 47 & Luke 24:44-53\_BTR

Celebrating Christ's birth makes sense, right?  
Good Friday and Easter too.  
But what's the big deal about *this* (particular) festival?

Well, let's put verse 10 of tonight's *Acts* reading "under the microscope" for a moment.

It goes like this: 'While [Jesus] was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.'

'*While* [H]e was going...'

This suggests that Jesus' departure (from the Apostles) wasn't instantaneous: He didn't suddenly vanish in a blinding flash of light or a choking cloud of dust like the road runner, with a "meep meep."

Rather, His "leave-taking" was a protracted, *gradual* one.

And notice the direction in which He left: '*up*'.

He didn't *walk* away - off to the Americas as the Mormons believe, or to another country to extend His ministry there as sceptics might suggest.

Rather, He went, we hear, '*toward* heaven'; and there's no mention of any sound either: it was, then, it seems, a graceful, serene *floating* away up into the sky until He reached such an extreme altitude that He was simply *beyond* sight.

And why?

*Why* do these details matter?

Because they are the icing on the cake: the cake, which has been the various proofs that Jesus has offered to humanity to answer that question, which appears (almost) right at the beginning of Luke's gospel: "'Who do the crowds say that I am?"; [9:18]. (And remember that Luke is also the author of *Acts*.)

And the answer we now see being made *unequivocally*, in the boldest of paint-strokes and the brightest of colours, by His *super*-natural ascent in the *unmistakeable* direction of the supposed dwelling-place of God is - 'of one being with the Father' - to quote the Creed, which we'll be reciting together momentarily.

You see, despite having been born of a human mother, Mary, Jesus demonstrates by a movement in this direction [thumb up] that His *true* Home is *within* the Trinity, and, therefore, that it was *from* the Trinity that He had become a man:

This is where He *really* belongs(!) - among angels [see: Rev. 5:6], and on a throne [see: Mt. 19:28].

It was here that He existed before human history; before the dinosaurs; before even the universe itself.

Indeed, it was *through* Him that all things were created, says the Bible, [see: Jn. 1:3].

His thirty or so years as a remarkably learned, miracle-working rabbi under the yoke of the Roman Empire in Judea at the end of the Iron Age, was, then, a "blip" - an excursion, a *foray*; occupying an extraordinarily brief "blink of an eye" in the context of His perpetual existence.

And for us, for Jesus to have returned to His rightful place at the right hand of the Almighty is of the greatest consequence.

How so?

It was of the greatest consequence because it is *here*, says the author of *Hebrews*, that He now - *right now* - encourages God - and I love this line - 'to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward' [5:2], which is us!

And this should provide you *immense* relief.

It does me!

It relieves us of anxiety about our "standing" with God because though we might fear the fact that '[H]e is mighty in strength of understanding' - as Job's friend Elihu tells him in the Old Testament, [36:5] - and 'shows no partiality', [34:19]; *Jesus*, having been *one of us*, '*sympathize[s]*', we hear, 'with our weaknesses' [Heb. 4:15], and as such interjects *feeling* into God's otherwise impeccably holy judgments, thus *tipping* the "scales" in our favor.

God, in other words, has freely and deliberately distorted and "bent" (out of shape) His own, righteous assessment of humanity; He has *subverted* it by readmitting the biased, emotional, *human* Jesus back into the eternal, flawless realm; back into Himself.

And so such is the importance of the "Ascension."

That, God, to put it simply, by "carrying" Jesus back to Heaven [Lk. 24:51], has knowingly taken a step that guarantees - as the Psalmist promised - '[H]e does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.' [103:9]. And He won't ever.

Halleluiah!