

6-2-24

Rocketship Jesus.

It is always good to come to town to be with my Spokane Friends. I grew up in Metaline Falls and I have made the trip to Spokane 100's of times. There are scenes of the river on the way that are breath taking that I never tire of and most of the way there is very little traffic. It is a good drive.

Going home, you come to the Sacheen cutoff, highway 211. You could go east to Newport and then turn north. 211 lets you cut the corner and come out at Usk. From the Sacheen cut-off to home, traffic drops big time. I had a friend that hitch hiked from Pullman in the 70's. He got dropped off at the cut off at 9 pm and didn't get picked up until early morning. It wasn't because no one would pick him up. It was because there were no cars.

Luke 24: 50-51

*When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven.*

The feast day in the church based on the reading is called the Ascension. It was 3 weeks ago. Tongue in cheek, it can also be referred to as Rocketship Jesus. Jesus blasting off into the heavens to sit on a mighty throne. I hope you know that Jesus is not sitting on a throne far away and God's home is not up there. The second soviet cosmonaut Gherman Titov said, *"Some say God is living there in space. I was looking around very attentively, but I did not see anyone there. I did not detect either angels or god."* Thank you, comrade, for dispelling a common Christian misconception.



To our ancient ancestors the heavens were a place of awe, wonder and mystery so it makes perfect sense to imagine it being the abode of God. If we don't get beyond that then we are always picturing God and Christ as remote and distant. We raise our eyes to the heavens to pray. I get it but it just reinforces a misconception. We could just as well lower our eyes to the earth. Why not? Dang it. God is right here. We are literally rubbing shoulders with the Divine. Let me make a clarification. God is up there. But God is down here, over there, under that. Most profoundly God is fully in you. In Colossians 3:11 Paul shouts, "There is only Christ, he is everything, and he is in everything," You want to be with the ones you love. Why would it be any different for that through which we live, move and have our being, that which is pure love?

*Brian McLaren reflecting on the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church comments, "Following Jesus today has much in common with the original disciples' experience.... But there is an obvious and major difference between our experience and theirs: they could see Jesus and we can't. Surprisingly, according to John's Gospel, that gives us an advantage. In John 16:7 Jesus says, "It's better that I go away so the Spirit can come." If he were physically present and visible, our focus would be on Christ specifically confined to just over there, or just right there ... but because of his absence, we discover the Spirit of Christ right here, in here, within.... "*

Right off the bat in the Lord's Prayer we say, "Our Father who art in heaven." I don't think Jesus meant up there. Heaven is wherever love is and God is love so God is right here, right now. Pope John Paul II, no raving liberal, said that heaven and hell are not geographical locations. They are states of being. If I have my state of being act together then I am in heaven and can bring heaven to others. The opposite is also true. My state of being can have me in hell and make life hell for others. He might not think so but Putin is in hell right now.

In the Lord's Prayer we say, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Obviously, we are praying for heaven to be now. In Matthew 4: 17 Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" and in Luke 17:21 "The kingdom of God is within you." It is supposed to be now, and part of our job as the body of Christ is to make it come about. To make this a world of compassion and mercy, a place where the common good guides all.

By putting heaven "up there and not until I die" it can become my private salvation plan. As long as I'm saved, screw the rest. Stack on top of that a warped interpretation of the book of Revelation and is it any wonder that many Christians don't give a rip about the state of the planet? Global warming? No biggie. God is going to burn it all up anyway and I'm outta this dump.

It is supposed to be now. CHRIST NOW. THE KINGDOM NOW. HEAVEN NOW.

I have diverged away from the Ascension. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. You know that. All four of our children live far away: Virginia, Long Island, Australia and Minneapolis. We wish they were closer but when we see each other it is very special. If they lived right next door then we would do what we all do. Take them for granted.

Christ left. It created a hole in the hearts of the apostles which He filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The spiritual path is one of emptying and filling, death and resurrection over and over again. The great mystics refer to the pulling away of the Divine as “The dark night of the soul”, “holy longing”, poverty for the Franciscans, darkness for Buddhists, the desert for Jesus. If you let Him, God will make bigger and bigger holes and then put more and more of the Spirit into you. Paul said, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” I suppose that saints are people that have gone through the cycle so many times that there aren’t much of them left and if you are full of yourself then there is no room for God.

Query 1: When you picture God in your mind where is He? Why there?

Query 2: Have you ever experienced the prolonged absence of a loved one?

Query 3: What are you doing to bring about the kingdom of God, heaven?