

This morning we celebrate an event in Christian History as monumental as the Incarnation of Christmas, death of the Messiah on the Cross, the Resurrection of Easter; yet something most of us have never given thought about. This event is not mentioned in all the Gospel of Matthew or John, and while noted in the Postscript of Mark, not mentioned in the original. An event described only in the Gospel of Luke and Acts. Because it is only mentioned here in the Bible, much of Christianity has assumed only a two-identity GOD; like the Roman GOD Janus. As if there were A HEBREW GOD in the Old Testament and a CHRISTIAN GOD: JESUS in the Gospels. We have longed for Jesus to come into our hearts, searched for his Second Coming; misunderstanding the importance for the EARLY CHURCH to name the TRINITY in this event Affirmed in the Apostles' Creed.

Let us back up and make certain we all are on the same page. What we call The OLD Testament, what Judaism calls The HEBREW BIBLE, includes the BOOKS of MOSES, all the LAW, the PROPHETS & PSALMS. Having tried covenant relationship with Adam and Eve; starting over with Noah's Family; starting again with Abraham and the generations of Isaac and Jacob who was called Israel; GOD then attempts to lead the world to come to GOD's Holy Mountain through the Monarchy of David. Through all the successive generation of Kings of Israel, Prophets, Exile and Redemption, still the World turned away from GOD. According to the New Testament, Almighty, Eternal, All Powerful God set aside all the Divinity and Power that is GOD to become a Human Messiah who is one with us.

At the end of LUKE's Gospel, Jesus describes the purpose of his life and ministry: "This is what I told you, while I was still with you: *'Everything must be fulfilled that is written about in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.'* Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." He told them, "This is what is written: *'The CHRIST will suffer and rise from the dead on the 3rd day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.'*" Throughout these last 40 days, we have repeated stories of Jesus' numerous Resurrection appearances, but in every occurrence their hearts were still captive to fear. These stories of the Old Testament, of Jesus' Life and Resurrection are what have been preached in every Church of every denomination for 2000 years.

The great 20th century Christian Theologian Karl Barth argued, "There is a relatively thin line in the New Testament, which speaks of Christ's ascension into heaven, BUT IN THAT MOMENT an ultimately unrivaled historical turning-point occurs." ONLY by the Ascension of Jesus, can the Holy Spirit Come!

In Genesis, when God created the Heavens and the Earth, were there witnesses to what God had done? When GOD laid aside all the power of being GOD, to be born a helpless infant, did anyone witness that? When GOD raised Jesus from death to Life, death was overwhelmed, evil lost its grip, did anyone see it? YET, here at the end of Luke and beginning of Acts, Jesus calls all his disciples, US, to serve as WITNESSES: As they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Set aside the HOW for a moment.

There is an important theological point here: *Is the Body of Christ important to us?*

This Body is the incarnational unity of God and Humanity!

This Body is what was Baptized.

This Body is what suffered in atonement for our sins.

This Body with all its wounds and scars is what God raised in the Resurrection.

Even after the resurrection, this Body of Christ walked with them to Emmaus, and Ate with the Disciples as proof he was not a Ghost but Real.

GOD IS Immortal, Invisible, Omnipotent meaning All Powerful, Omniscient meaning All Knowing, and Omnipresent meaning GOD can be present everywhere all at once. When Jesus gave up Divinity becoming

Human, he became the body of Christ. A Human Body whether before death or after resurrection can only be in one place at any one time. SO what happened to the Body of Christ, is important to our faith.

Like Jesus' Apostles we want to know WHEN we will die, when life will end, and Jesus cautioned that it is not for us to know the times or periods that the Father has established by GOD's own authority. We are not GOD. It is sufficient that we are humans loved by God, so we have to trust.

As 21st Century pragmatists, we want to know the HOW of the Ascension. We no longer have belief in mysticism that Jesus stepped onto a cloud, or suddenly could fly; it had been hard enough to trust that he walked on water and was raised from the dead.

There comes a point in faith of believing because of contrast, similar to the Sermon of Ecclesiastes if there is Evil there must be Good, if there is Hate there must be Love, if there is War we have to believe in the possibility of Peace, If there is a time to refrain from dancing, there will surely come a time to Dance!

They thought the grave would silence him forever.

They nailed him to the cross, by hands and feet and put him in the ground.

All of the powers of the world were thrown against him. Everything had conspired to silence him forever.

They held him down. They nailed him down. They betrayed and murdered the Body of Christ.

That God raised him from Death to Eternal Life, is the miracle of Easter; afterward, Judaism's emphasis was not on a place of Heaven or Hell, so much as that AFTER THIS LIFE, we Return one with/part of GOD.

The other day, I was sitting with someone on Hospice Care, who claimed they were not afraid of death, they were afraid of suffering, and very afraid of the journey after death. I tried to describe what I truly believe, that "the Journey" may be less of from here to there or to eternity, as from this Life to a different Reality. There are times when this life, for some can be Hell.

To change reality, witnessing life as suffering, to the joy of being with God... I believe that is Heaven!

There are times when this reality is Flat, where every afternoon Jeopardy comes on before the nightly news, where there are always fears of Recession and War, stories of Hate and Politics...

To cross that line, that thin line to be able to witness the love of GOD, I believe is Miraculous.

Do you recall the Sally Field's Movie "Places in the Heart" where all throughout the film, there had been struggle for survival, struggle in a community of racism, lynchings and murder. But in the final scene, the whole community were gathered together in worship to share the sacrament of Communion, and as the camera panned the congregation with the singing of "Blessed Assurance", you suddenly recognized that in that body of Christ were all those living and those who had died, those who had hated and those murdered.

What if sitting beside us this morning are Margaret and Mary Lou, Mary Lee and Doris, Mark and Larry, and all those who have gone before us in every generation. Ascension!

No longer is there suffering. No longer are there fears. There is only unity as the Body of Christ with GOD.

On the other-side of the THIN LINE in the New Testament, are stories of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, if you have a pencil or pen with you, if you would take your bulletin, and where it says "Acts of the Apostles" cross that out, because truthfully, these are each Acts of the Holy Spirit. They occur in the experience of this Apostle or that one, of Peter, James, John, Bartholomew and Paul, that when Christ has ASCENDED to be with God as LORD OF ALL CREATION, we are not abandoned... Christ has left with us the Holy Spirit. We imagine, it is pretty great, that this summer and each of the last few years, even in June and July, South of Tucson, in the 21st Century, we have had 8-10-12 New Members who have wanted to become part of this body of Christ, THESE are stories of 4,000 being added to their number in a single day. How is not really what is important, but we affirm JESUS IS IN HEAVEN and THE SPIRIT OF GOD is with us!