



Pentecost/Endowment Sunday

June 8, 2014

Thought For The Week

Scriptures: Acts 1: 1-11 • Ephesians 1: 17-23 • Matthew 28: 16-20

I have heard it said or seen it written somewhere that most people have a natural affinity for the place where they were born; if they had their choice they would return there. I suspect that most of us do return home, although it may just be our memories that we are searching for. Perhaps there is something sacred about that place and its surroundings where we first came to life and spent many precious years.

Speaking for myself, I was born at Crittenden Hospital in Detroit. My parents were living in Detroit on a street called Coyle, just a couple blocks East of Greenfield Ave. and about a block North of Grand River Ave. I don't really consider that my home though, because we moved to Redford Township when I was four years old. Most people couldn't believe that we moved out West of Telegraph Rd. They would say, "Nobody lives out there." I lived off a dirt road through my teen years. It never bothered me too much until I started taking pride in the cars that I was driving. Then, every time it rained, I was sorry for all that dirt because most of it ended up on the bottom portion of my car. Nonetheless, I do have good memories of that house and neighborhood. I usually drive past the house if I am in the area.

I think it's safe to say that most of us have a certain connectedness to the memories of our childhood. It's there that we began to experience the world around us, a world that gradually made its impression on our essence. After all is said and done, we are what we are, by way of the collected human experiences that come our way.

All this comes to mind on the day that Christians celebrate as Pentecost Sunday and the Ascension of the Lord. If you will allow me, I will name it the Lord's Home-going, the return of Jesus Christ to God's kingdom.

The question that arises is where is home? Not Bethlehem or Nazareth or even in a place called heaven. I suggest that Jesus returned to the intimate presence of God the Father a "place" where we all will some day reside.

So, why all the references in the scripture to Jesus going up and being consumed by the clouds? It has everything to do with Middle Eastern cosmology, with the way that people imagined planet earth in those times. In their mind, Jesus could not have gone down into the earth; that is the place of the dead, the place of darkness. Jesus would need to go up because the heavens are above us; the realm of the Spirit is beyond planet earth. Ultimately, Jesus, like the rest of us, would not remain on earth. Earthly existence is limited to that time and space allotted to us by the Creator. At some point in history, once we have completed our mission, God sets aside our time on earth and we return to the presence of the One who brought us to this place in the beginning.

So, the ultimate question is not one of geography or cosmology. The question is outlined so clearly in the Acts of the Apostles and in the gospel for this celebration. Jesus appeared to the disciples and explained that his work on earth is now completed; he must return to the Father. But what happens

now to all the work Jesus did, the preaching and establishment of God's kingdom on earth? It could only continue if the disciples (and us) are determined to carry on Jesus work, not in heaven, but here on earth in places and circumstances where it is needed most.

If we're to use the cosmology metaphor once again, we would need to say that the work of Jesus was begun here on earth not in heaven. If it is to have any meaning or purpose it needs to be continued right here where it started. If we all do our part, then there will still be time to consider that other question about going home. One task at a time...

Prayer Thought For The Week

We thank you for all that gives us pleasure: beaches, mountains, valleys, fruits and flowers. Indeed, all nature celebrates you, their Creator, in desert or rain forest, on mountain or plain, in summer as well as in winter. Thank you, O Lord God, for all you do to sustain us.

We remember those who are poor, dispossessed, rich, black, white, all the peoples of the earth whatever their nation, color, or creed. May we all know peace, Great God.

May national pride be tempered with the awareness of injustice fostered by rampant consumerism. May our eyes be open and our spirits willing to serve you by curbing our wants, O God, so that there will be enough and to spare for all your people.

Thank you for the people who dwell in French Polynesia, for in them we see a reflection of you. May they know the peace that you can bring to life. This day, make us aware that all your people are to be loved and handled with care.

We honor and praise you for the Prince of Peace. May his life enrich ours as we align our desires with your vision of shalom. Bless us and hear our confessions and petitions, we humbly pray.

May the praise and the honor and the glory be yours forever and ever. Amen.

Stewardship Thought For The Week

We are not to give grudgingly. There is a release we experience in cheerful giving that is not under compulsion or necessity. Grudgingly means out of sorrow or grief. We do not give under the grief of necessity but we give a generous determined amount with joyful abandon.

We are secure in God's faithfulness to provide for us and that provides freedom for cheerful giving. We rest in God who is trustworthy. It is with a cheerful attitude that we become free to give as the widow gave. We give out of poverty and not simply out of our surplus.

If you have learned to give to the Lord's work by sacrificing the things you *want* you are doing well. But when your faith grows strong you should ask for opportunity to sacrificially give the things you *need*. That is what the widow did. Jesus said, she put in all that she had to live on.

This kind of giving requires faith in God. You have to believe that He is in control and able to provide for you or you cannot sacrifice what you need.