



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

X Marks the Spot

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

May 17, 2015

Just as there is an "X marks the spot" for the place of Jesus' birth in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, there is likewise an "X marks the spot" for Jesus' ascension on the top of the Mount of Olives, which is just across the valley from Jerusalem. In Bethlehem it is a silver star; on the Mount of Olives, it is a footprint. Ever since the late 300s, there has been a worship space built around the footprints in the dust, venerated as the lift-off point for Jesus' departure out of this world and up into Heaven. It was a church for a long time and has been a mosque for even longer. The right footprint can still be seen, under glass, at the Dome of the Ascension. The left one was moved to the famous gold domed Al Aksa Mosque on the Temple Mount where it now rests behind the pulpit. Aren't we humans funny in how we take a mystery and try to make it concrete. We love "X marks the spot" even for things that cannot be located.

The danger for us in making these mysteries concrete is that it closes off the greater story which is meant to unfold in us. As long as we box Christ in to a silver star or footprints or even a small wafer of bread, we keep the Christ consciousness somewhere else, outside of us where we're safe from its disruptive power. When we are prepared to locate Christ in us (rather than exclusively in Him) and accept the responsibility of being the Body of Christ then ascension can begin for us as well. Why do you think I say, "We are the Body of Christ" when I give you the Bread of Heaven? Our Christian journey is to become the fullest expression of the Body of Christ that we can imagine, not to venerate a wafer as "X marks the spot."

The Ascension is one of those tougher Jesus moments for us to embrace - we don't quite know what to do with it. But let's try. To ascend is to move up on some scale, whether it's musical or architectural, physical or metaphorical. It has a connotation that that which is high is preferable to that which is low. It's like evolution - to evolve into a greater, higher, expression of something. There is a sense, a purpose, behind all of life that we are moving to a higher order, which is what Jesus represents for us.

Many of the earliest Christian thinkers, the church fathers, wrote that the ultimate purpose of the incarnation was our own deification. In the 2nd century Irenaeus, said that "The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself." Clement of Alexandria said "The Word of God became man, that you might learn from a man how to become God. The deification of humanity is a major tenet of the Eastern Orthodox faith. It's actually the whole purpose of the Christian faith - that we might ascend out of the human darkness in which we dwell, to a higher state.

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To understand the difference between Jesus and us, we actually need a bit of science, the notion that all of the created order, the entire cosmos, is made up of frequency, determined by a rate of vibration. The faster the violin string vibrates, the higher the note. Colors are visible expressions of different frequencies of light. Some are so high that we cannot see them, just as there are sounds that are too high for us to hear - unless we're a dog!

I am reminded of a favorite Star Trek episode when poor Spock found himself suddenly alone on the Enterprise. Eventually he figures out that somehow, Captain Kirk and the others have been changed, their frequency has moved beyond the normal range and they have become invisible to even Spock's super-sensitive Vulcan senses. They are there, he just cannot see or hear them. I have always thought that Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry was a prophetic genius. Jesus always had his antennae tuned more finely than everyone around him, he could see, hear and know beyond regular human ability. Once having died and been resurrected, he surely was changed - as told in his ability to walk through seemingly solid walls.

Now, all of this violates my usual rule of not asking how something happened but rather what we are to learn from the story. Ascension is when something moves beyond our visible spectrum and why would we not expect that of Jesus. The world is theme park of the lowest, densest frequencies, held in place by anger, fear, and violence and all of the tools used to keep them in play - things like money, the media and politics. Ascension is when one figures out how to be in the world but not of it, to not be held hostage by such low frequencies. It is the product of spiritual growth.

Another thing that ascension is, is a necessary leave-taking so that we are not tempted to rely on Jesus too much, and assume that he is divine enough for all of us. We are now responsible for following through on what he taught, and living into a higher frequency, filling our lives with more light and love. The frequencies with which we surround ourselves become important because they affect us. If you walk into a room in which everyone is angry and scared, you will either turn around and walk out because it feels so awful, or in a short time, you will be in the same frequency. There was a powerful scene in the movie 42 - the Jackie Robinson story. A young boy was sitting in the stands with his father, clutching his mitt, excited to see his hero, Peewee Reese, who was one of Jackie's teammates. However, his father was not happy about a Negro playing in the Major Leagues and he and those around him started yelling the kind of racial slurs you might expect in the late 1940s. In a short time, the boy has turned from a smiling kid at a baseball game to a snarling angry miniature man. He was possessed by the frequency of hatred. In that moment, he had little choice, but we do. So be careful what you surround yourself with. Find a way to stay informed about the world without ugly commentary.

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Be careful what you eat. Food has a frequency as well. The meat of animals killed in horrifying slaughterhouses carries the frequency of their fear. Their fear causes chemicals and hormones to be mass produced in their bodies. Do you really want that in yours? There are humane ways to achieve the steak on your plate, you just have to work a little harder to find it. The more organic and closer to natural your food, the cleaner and lighter your frequency will be.

Make time every day to sit in stillness and contemplate peace and calm. Jesus often went off to pray. He took time out of his ministry to nourish the frequency of love and peace within him. Above all, forgive. Nothing will drag you down like holding a grudge. If you are perpetually annoyed by something or someone, you need to change that. Figure it out, let it go and move on so you can move up.

You are the steward of your life, your body, your thoughts. If you understand that the whole purpose of following Jesus is to become like him, then you have important choices to make in every moment. Observe; are you choosing the frequency of love or not. Are you choosing compassion and forgiveness or not? Ascension isn't where some footprints are kept under glass. It's what can happen in you. It's what is meant to happen in you so that where you are is "X marks the spot."

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