



In vigilia ascensionis No
 nativitas Inuitatorum
 m. vi. ut s. fm iohes

In illo tpe.
 Subleuati
 ihus oculi
 in celum.
 dixit. Pa
 te venit ho
 rifica filium tuum.

ut filius tuus clauficet
 te. Et rel. Omelia beati
 augustin lectio prima.

Proteratiois nre
 unigenitus
 in forma serui: et ex formi
 sui si hoc op. eet orare si
 lentio. s. ita p. se exhibe
 re voluit precatore ut me



A Sermon for Christ Church on the Ascension

In the Name of our heavenly Lord. Amen

When I retired last December, I said I would never preach again. But for me, this is an exceptional day, a day about which my only original theology is formed. Some of you have heard of this from others. But I decided that you would probably like to hear about this from the horse's mouth and it would be worthwhile to you hearing from me even in my dilapidated state. So here I stand in this holy place to share this insight with you.

I find I have two things to say to you. I'm going to speak about the second thing first. Something you probably don't know about me is that I have a bachelor's degree in mathematics. That is the source of this insight I am about to share with you. The thing is, I never thought my mathematic degree would be of any use to God. My knowledge of poetry, my interest in language – these are suitable things to bring to the ministry. But mathematics? Just a happenstance. But the fact is, when you give yourself to God, you don't know what God is going to find useful. Be advised. Any part of you may be something God can find to use. So be prepared.

And with that long prologamina completed, let me get on with the meat of this sermon.

Last Thursday, those of us who observe the Kalendar celebrated the Feast of the Ascension. I have a picture here of the Ascension, which Sarah is going to walk around with to show it off to you. I am fond of the picture because it makes me giggle. We can listen to see if it makes all of you giggle too.

No, I do not believe that Christ ascended into heaven like a helium balloon. That’s what we say in the creed you know – every Sunday, or at least every other Sunday now. I say it twice a day – “He ascended into heaven.” So I checked to see what the Bible says. I confidently set my computer to search the Bible for the word ascended. To my surprise, none of the uses of that word had anything to do with Christ. So then I looked at the last chapter of each of the Gospels and the first chapter of Acts. This is what I found:

Matthew doesn’t deal with the Ascension. The late addition to Mark’s Gospel does. It says

Mark 16:19 ¹⁹ So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

Luke’s Gospel says

Luke 24:51 ⁵¹ While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.

John’s Gospel does not deal with the Ascension. And in the book of Acts we have:

Acts 1:9-10 ⁹ And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes.

So, while we have the word “up,” we really do not have the word “ascended.” Interesting.

Now I need to talk to you a bit about mathematics. And a particular branch of mathematic called non-Euclidian geometry. You remember Euclid? Three points determine a plane and the shortest distance between two points is a straight line? Well the people who study non-Euclidian geometry wonder about how things would be with different rules. Incidentally, if you are going from here to Hong Cong, the shortest distance between two points is not a straight line – it is a curve, because we live on a sphere, not a flat plain. Well, non-Euclidian geometers wonder about things like what the rules would be if we lived on a donut. Things like that. That sounds totally useless doesn't it? But I believe something connected with our exploration of space – perhaps it is the space station itself – is structured like a donut, so it became useful after all.

But the concept they developed that I want to grab hold it is something called N-dimensional space. I'm going to be talking a bit about this, so let me spell it out for you: That's a capitol N, followed by a hyphen, followed by the word dimensional. You can call it multi-dimensional space if you like. The capitol N means that we don't know how many dimensions we are talking about, but we assume that it is a great many.

Now I believe that God dwells in N-dimensional space. (This, of course, is just a metaphor, but I find as time has gone on that I actually believe this.) We, of course, are stuck in 3-dimensional space: height, width, and depth – or 4-dimensional space, if you count time. Because of our limitation, we cannot perceive God, but God is present here and now – just in a space beyond our comprehension.

Take a look at one of the stained glass windows that has people in it. They live in two-dimensional space. They have height and width, but no depth. And we can see them but they cannot see us. They have no concept of what it is to live in a four-dimensional world. We are like those people in the stained-glass windows. We are stuck in our own 4-dimensional world. But that does not mean that there is not an N-dimensional space all around us.

This means that what we celebrated last Thursday was not Christ behaving like a helium balloon but His expansion from our 4-dimensional space into the N-dimensional space that is heaven.

I find I am quite comfortable with this. It means that Christ is right here with us today – we just don't know how to perceive Him. It works with the theological concept of realized eschatology – the idea that heaven is available to us now - not pie in the sky by and by. It explains what happens when we have a mystical experience of the holy – that holy space just cracks open for us. And Christ said He went to prepare a place for us, so this means that our next home will be in N-dimensional space. I find I am much more comfortable with that idea than with the idea of sitting on a cloud learning to play the harp.

So I hope the liturgical police aren't here today, because, just for today, I am going to propose that we edit the Nicene Creed. Instead of “He ascended into heaven,” Let's say “He expanded into heaven.” Would you practice with me one time, please: “He expanded into heaven.” Thank you.

**In the Name of the Omnipotent, Omnipresent, caring and loving God.
Amen.**