

Sermon- May 13th 2018- Ascension Sunday

UP – View From on High

Grace and Peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Today is Ascension Sunday. I just read the Gospel reading where we find Jesus Ascending to His Father. We'll get to that text in a moment.

But first a question: Do you enjoy animated films? Give me a show of hands. For me, as the grandchildren were growing up, it was a necessary part of being a Grandpa. Not enjoyed for me but necessary. It was a kind of penance - worse than sharing confession with a hard of hearing priest - if you came from the Roman Catholic tradition.

There was one animated film a few years ago that reminded me of the Gospel lesson for today. It was simply called UP. Did you see it? If not here is a brief synopsis.

Carl, a retired balloon salesman, is aging and presents himself as angry, unhappy and unfulfilled. In short, he is a cranky old man. One day, Carl decides to change the course of his life. So, he attaches thousands of balloons to his house and when he cuts the lines, he is 20,000 feet above the earth. A lot happens on his journey. Russell, a Boy Scout who was trying to assist Carl, is clinging to the front porch. Other characters appear - Doug the Dog, Kevin the exotic bird. Crazy stuff happens. But the point is the trip. It's amazing what Carl could see from 20,000 feet above the earth. He could see beauty, and tranquility and peace. What he couldn't see was man-made boundaries between countries. He couldn't see ethnic barriers. The glass ceilings of gender, race, religion, poverty, illiteracy and social status had all disappeared.

Of course, everything changes when they return to earth. All of Carl's problems follow him wherever he goes. Kind of funny. That's how life is for us. We can escape the challenges of life for awhile, by going on vacation, reading a good book, or watching a good game. Some of us escape by drinking, or medicating, but, sooner or later we all come back to earth.

Let's get back to the Gospel and Jesus' version of the UP. Jesus is raised up to heaven. So the question is ? What did he see? Did he see the plight of the poor? Did he see the selfishness of people, or the pride of the wealthy, or the abuse of the powerful? Of course he did. He sees it all and most likely continues to weep at what he sees.

But he also sees US. And very often he sees faithful, generous, and loving children. But also occasionally he wishes that we would change. Become better than we are. To get rid of some things that get in the way of being the way Jesus would like us to be. You know anger, hatred, unforgiving attitude, or prejudice.

A quick story. My mother was born in the Holy Land (Norway). She came to this country when she was just 20 and settled in Brooklyn, N.Y. She was gracious, kind and accepting of almost all people. I was born in 1943 during World War Two. Those war years were tough on Mom. Her family was still in Norway. Mother, Father, brother and sister. Not to mention a ton of cousins. She was the only one here in the New Land.

Back in Norway, the country was occupied by Nazi Germany. Very tough on all of her loved ones. Germany occupied Norway by simply marching across Sweden which had been neutral. This developed Mom's prejudice of Sweden and Swedish people. It didn't matter that Sweden probably only had one tank and couldn't stop Hitler anyway. Prejudice doesn't care about logic.

So one day in the 1950s, I am playing roller hockey in the street in front of the apartment building where we lived. We had a great game going, skating and shooting the puck into a small area we had set up as our net. Required great dexterity, especially avoiding the cars that were screaming up the street. I had become quite adept at "lifting" the puck. Moving the wrist quickly while holding the hockey stick. The puck could lift 5-10 feet in the air. Really fun to do. On one sequence, I really lifted the puck. It shot off my hockey stick, hit a car going up the street and sailed into the 2nd floor window of Mrs Olson, who lived in my apartment building. She lived on the 2nd floor front, we lived on the 2nd floor rear.

As soon as the hockey puck destroyed Mrs Olson's window, everybody took off running. Mrs Olson opens the broken window and starts screaming at the top of her lungs. You could have heard her 3 blocks away. By this time, I am hiding behind a Chevy. I sneak into the front door of the apartment building and quietly open our apartment door. Mrs Olson is still screaming. I explain in detail what had happened to my mother. How, in fact, I had broken Mrs Olson's window and that Mrs Olson is very upset and continues to yell and scream about juvenile delinquents and the police. My mother looks at me, smiles and says "Well, she's Swedish you know." That was it. Accepting of all people except people from one country. Did she finally change? Yes, with God's help, she did. Counted many Swedish friends when she went to the heavenly kingdom.

Yes, Jesus wants us to grow and become better than we are. Our prayer should be Change us Lord. Make us more loving, more understanding, more forgiving.

Two weeks ago, I was at the Confirmation Service for one of my grandchildren. It was a proud moment for me. Thomas Hays Ellisen was asked a question during the ceremony. Could very well be the question that Jesus asks from his heavenly kingdom. It's a big question, has to do with what Jesus sees.

“Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you to live among
God’s faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive
for justice and peace in all the earth.

And Thomas Hays Ellisen responds –‘I do and I ask God to help and guide me.’
And that is our response. A response that indicates our willingness to change, to get better. Lord with your help I will be less judgmental.

With your help I will be more forgiving. With your help I will be more caring.
Lord, with your help I will see all people as my sisters and brothers. You can pick what needs to be changed in your life!

So on this Ascension Day, Jesus looks down and sees Carl and Us and our desire to change, to become more Christlike and then he says, “Well done, my good and faithful servant”

Amen- Let it be so.