

A SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY EASTER 7A: GEOFF CHADWITH

THE ASCENSION:

I want to begin today by talking about how Luke has put the liturgical calendar together for us at this time of the year. We are in an *in-between time*, between the Ascension, which was on Thursday, and Pentecost which will be next Sunday. There is this period of 10 days between Jesus returning to heaven and the giving of the Spirit. It is because of Luke that we have this arrangement in our lectionary.

Luke has these post-resurrection appearances, (which of course, appear in all the Gospels), of Jesus being with his disciples after the events of Easter. But then there comes a time when Jesus eventually needs to return to heaven. And so we have Jesus returning, and that gives us this season that we now call Easter- the 50 day season of Easter where we've been learning about to post resurrection appearances of Jesus.

So now we're in this little ten-day period- between Jesus returning to heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

I have students often saying to me that this story of Jesus returning to heaven is a bit like Jesus going up into heaven like a spaceship. It it all seems a bit strange and a bit odd. And as you know, the astronauts who've been up in space would say "Well we couldn't find heaven there."

So what does that all mean?

Well first of all we need to understand the three-tier universe structure of the world that the early people understood. They thought that the world had three levels.

- there was a level under the ground with the pillars of the earth were and shouldn't be shaken.
- then there was the region where we lived.
- and then above that was the sky. But its's more like a bubble; so that the sky protects us from the watery chaos that is above us and the watery chaos which is below the ground. And we all know this watery chaos below the ground because if you dig down far enough you will find water.

So this ancient view of the world was that we were in this safe bubble with water all around it. God was just on the other side of the bubble. It's actually a lovely view in a way, and its sort of speaks to us in a way that we need to still care for the little bubble that we do live in these days.

So when those early writers are talking about Jesus returning to heaven, for them that made perfect sense in their world. The resurrected Jesus was going to back to the place where God was. Heaven is where God is and Jesus is going there.

And maybe I think that's how we should understand it rather than trying to explain that Jesus is like a sky-rocket or something (as my primary school kids tell me). Jesus is returning to where God is.

That's what this is about really. Jesus is the Divine One. Jesus is in favour with God. Jesus has a has a home where God is.

And we well might ask "Where is God?" Traditionally we've understood that God is present in two ways:

- God is present transcendentally. (That is, God is everywhere at all times.)

- And God is also present within us. (Immanent)

And maybe we can ask that question; “Where is God” and answer it by saying “Within us- God is actually within us”.)

And if Jesus has returned to where God is, perhaps Jesus is going to return to be within us.

And if we think like that, it's a point towards Pentecost which will happen next week.

Take a moment now to contemplate where God might be within you and what God might be saying to you, and how God might be helping you in your present situation.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.