

LOOK UP**BLC – 5.13.18 - ASCENSION – B. HULL SOMERS***Acts 1:1-11, Ephesians 1:15-23, Luke 24:44-53*

Dogs are wonderful. They are loyal companions, wonderful for children and a great excuse to exercise. Not all dogs are the created equal. Just like humans, they are very diverse. And, quite frankly, some dogs are smarter than others.

We once had a friend who had probably the least intelligent dog I have ever met. He was a chocolate lab. Very, very sweet. But very, very dumb. These friends had a house with two stories. The dog did not know how to climb stairs when his owners went upstairs. Their stairs went up from the living room and arrived at the second level over the kitchen so the stairs appeared to the dog as if they would lead there. Every day, several times a day, he watched them go without being able to follow and then, as they disappeared up the

stairs, he would run into the kitchen thinking he would find them there. He never found them there. He would bark and run back and forth until they miraculously appeared again descending from above.

It was beyond this sweet dog's comprehension that there was a place above the kitchen.

This is the image I have of the Ascension.

Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives at Bethany and had an incredible day with his nearest and dearest. Their eyes were opened, their minds were opened, their hearts were opened – to the message of God's love throughout the Scriptures. They were illuminated to discover that what they thought was a manual for just one, small tribe of folk to belong to God was actually a manifesto of God's ever-expanding grace, love and inclusion. They were overjoyed to hear of their own belonging

to this grace, and they were inspired to use their lives to proclaim it to everyone – Jew, Greek, Samaritan, male, female, slave, free, old, young. Many of them would end up stepping off that mountain and into ministry and would eventually be martyred for their proclamation of this scandalous love and grace. That is how compelling it was. Not just life-changing but something that would inspire a person to give their life up, to spend it all and gamble on love.

At the end of this incredible day where the nearest and dearest of Jesus got to download all that wisdom and grace – there was an unexpected departure. Jesus was lifted into heaven. To the disciples' chocolate lab-sized brains it was incomprehensible. They stared up. Incredulous.

Paintings depicting this look like a Blue Angels show – heads pointed heavenward but not at jets, instead at the

bottoms of feet. It is in this moment that the disciples of Jesus were reminded of what reality they were operating in. To watch something like that transpire after journeying with Jesus in ministry, seeing him die on the cross and encountering him risen – it was powerful. It was re-orienting. No longer would they be afraid of what could be done to them on earth – to their reputations, to their possessions, to their safety, to their lives. They knew in that moment that the ultimate reality was written and sealed in love and life, full stop.

Images and icons of this event typically focus on the ascending Jesus with the chocolate lab disciples staring up with their tongues sticking out of their faces...but they do not depict the footprints that were left where Jesus last stood.

Amongst the disciples who stared, was the last time that Christ's footsteps would only be two feet. On the way down the

mountain that evening, Christ's footsteps were many. Every person who had been inspired and expanded in God's love and grace that day became Christ's hands and feet.

Jesus leaving, although it felt terrible for his friends and disciples, was actually genius. Giving many the license and authority to move out in God's love made the physical capacity for that love endless. It is the original multi-level marketing campaign. But instead of selling Tupperware, these newly minted Good News slingers were equipped with the FREE love and grace of the Most High.

It is why WE Christians, together, are the Body of Christ. When his feet left earth, our feet began to bring the Kingdom.

Richard Rohr's definition of what the church was originally intended is: "*a living organism* that communicates the Gospel primarily through *relationships*. By remaining—against all trials

and resistance—inside this luminous web of relationship, this vibrational state of love, we experience a very honest and healthy notion of salvation. If you are trying to do it alone and apart, it is not salvation at all, but very well disguised self-interest. Peacemaking, forgiveness, and reconciliation are not some kind of ticket to heaven later. They are the price of peoplehood—the signature of heaven—now.”

We are better together. In fact, we CANNOT be the body of Christ without each other. Jesus did not ascend into heaven leaving a special dispensation to just one of His followers. He left an eternal blessing to all and then urged them that they would be even more equipped later...continual blessing and equipping – embedding in each of us different aspects of Himself, different gifts, so that we needed all the puzzle pieces

to move forward. Like an elaborate piece of Ikea furniture, we are all needed, otherwise we fall apart.

Living in this way is counter-cultural. Everything in our culture champions the self-made person. Individualism is the highest aim of our society.

But as Christians we are invited to not look around and assimilate to what is the popular way, but to LOOK UP to the ways of heaven. To be reminded of where our hope comes from and from where our strength is given. It is where the embodiment of God's love went in the ascension and from whence it empowers us even now.

We are not called to fulfill the goals of society and then, if any energy or resources are left over, to be a part of the Body of Christ. We are called to be the Body of Christ first and

foremost and to find our identity in God's love and be working in the signature of heaven now!

This is what the ascension is for. It was not to confuse the chocolate labs. It was not to show off Jesus' superman moves. It was to empower the people of God to live in and spread God's love. It was to make what was one footprint of God's grace become an army of footprints – motivated and empowered with grace. It was to remind us that we are all integral to the Body of Christ and also in need of each other.

Did you know there are things that ONLY YOU can do for the Kingdom in this Body of Christ? Only you! We need you! The hurting need you, the imprisoned need you, the rejected need you, we need you. And did you know that you CANNOT live in the fullness of Christ's love alone? You need us! The

hurting need us – you and you and you and you – all working in harmony with your many and varied gifts and strengths.

We need each other, for the sake of the world. We need each other, for the sake of the Good News. The Body of Christ did not ascend to heaven over 2000 years ago. The Body of Christ is right here. Amen.

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