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Ascension

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Last week, as we were wrapping up our day of service at Growing to Give's farm in Brunswick, I was sitting at a picnic table with my son, having a snack

As we sat there, one of our members found a Geocache – have you heard of these? Does anyone here hunt geocaches?

I have never searched for geocaches but I've heard about them and have people in my life who search for them

Geocaches are small boxes that are hidden at specific geolocations – often in the woods but not always like this geocache at the farm – and inside are log books where the people who find them can log their code name as proof that they've found it, and sometimes there are items in the box for trade like little trinkets

When I say that these boxes can be found at specific geolocations I mean *specific* geolocations – Geocaches are listed by their latitude and longitude like: 45°17'28"N 122°24'48"W.

That latitude and longitude are the location of the very first geocache – in Beavercreek, OR

Also, I was “this week years old,” by the way, when I realized that geolocations are space *and* time (lat/long, and minutes and seconds)

You'd think with that level of specification people would find the geocache without much fuss, but you still sometimes have to search a bit to find them

Then, once you sign the logbook and exchange any trinkets, you have to put the geocache back *exactly* where you found it so that the next Geocaching aficionado can find it, too

In case you're wondering, our exact geolocation right now is 43°47'7"N, 70°9'30"W

No, there's no geocache hidden on our property – yet – but I do think there's a treasure here

Today in our liturgical calendar we are celebrating the Ascension of Jesus to heaven

The holiday was technically on Thursday, 40 days after Easter, but since I talked briefly about the Ascension in my Easter sermon, it felt important to celebrate this theologically significant event on a Sunday when we could really think about it together

The Ascension is, in many ways, an overlooked part of the story

As Christians we know that Jesus was raised from the dead and that he walked the earth with his wounded, resurrected body – talking and eating with his disciples, showing them the scars on his hands, feet, and side

But, we often don't think too much passed that – understandably so, the resurrection is a big enough moment to digest

Have you ever wondered why the wounded, resurrected Christ is not *still* walking the earth?

Might make our evangelism campaigns a bit easier if I'm totally honest

The reason is because Jesus ascended into heaven – does that ring a bell? It should, we say it in our creeds: “on the third day he rose again, he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father”

Like Moses and Elijah before him, today's gospel says that Jesus, while he was in dialog with his disciples, "withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven"

No more Jesus on earth.

Rather, Jesus in the realm of everlasting to everlasting

Jesus in the space that has no bounds, that knows no time

No specific geolocation can help us locate Jesus, but Jesus can be found in every geolocation

And this is precisely the significance of this holiday, according to Michael Fitzpatrick, a chaplain and philosopher

"What changed at the ascension of Christ," Michael writes, "was his spatiotemporal limitedness. If Jesus had remained in a resurrected terrestrial state, he could only be Lord and Messiah for a handful of people, those who lived in his immediate proximity. The declaration that Jesus has ascended to heaven is not a claim so much about his body leaving earth as it is an assurance that Jesus is now present for everyone."¹

You do not need the exact coordinates to access the risen Christ, Jesus is present for everyone

I joked that there's no geocache here, but rather there is a treasure – and it's true!

This building, this space, has become a place in which many of us gather to experience and encounter the Divine

¹ <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/3701-ascending-with-christ>

through stories, prayer, study, song, service

in joy, grief, wonder, confidence, and uncertainty

this is a place where that which is limitless and timeless takes shape even for just a moment

But, specific geolocations, otherwise known as churches, aren't the source of God's love – they are the sustenance, or as a member of the church says “the weekly tune up”

Lest we think that a life of faith is a life of hunting for geocache after geocache – specific location of holy encounter after another specific location of holy encounter – lest we think that we must go from church to church in order to access God – the feast of the Ascension reminds us that no matter where we are – space or time – Jesus is present to us

I don't say that to diminish what takes place here, or in any church for that matter – it sounds like I'm trying to put churches out of business

Absolutely not! I think what we do here is massively important towards our deepening in discipleship and the community that is formed here is massively important to buoy each of us through life's journeys and to continue in lives of faith

But, what I think is so wonderfully important about the truth of the Ascension, is that if there have ever been moments in your life when you felt far from God, when you felt lost or disconnected, when faith seemed impossible to grasp, you were never lost from Jesus' love

And that is true even when I take those statements out of the past tense – if you feel far from God, lost or disconnected, and faith seems impossible to grasp, Jesus is as near to you in those moments as your breath

The spatiotemporal limitedness of a specifically geolocated Jesus was released, liberated, let go when Jesus ascended into heaven

We no longer have that physically body on which to rely as his followers, and yet we are never without his presence

Michael Fitzpatrick wrote, “by ascending into heaven and thereby withdrawing his resurrected body from our immediate access, Christ invigorates our faith, hope, and love.”

One does not need to find 43°47'7"N, 70°9'30"W, otherwise known as St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Yarmouth, ME, to find God

One only needs to find themselves, in the space and time in which you are, to sense a God who loves you without ceasing and without boundary

Sometimes, I feel like it would be nice if God had a geolocation that I could find – especially in those moments when it's incredibly difficult to find myself and to sense God's presence

It is precisely those moments when turning to a geolocation dedicated to the worship and discipleship of God can help us in the journey

One does not need to go Geocaching to experience the awe and majesty of the outdoors

And yet, it is also true that Geocaching adds an element of fun, excitement, connection, and challenge to the experience of being outdoors

One does not need a geolocation to find God

And yet, it is also true that places of worship can add an element of fun, excitement, connection, and challenge to the experience of being God's beloved Creation

So let us celebrate, today, the knowledge that Jesus ascended into heaven and his spatiotemporal limitedness was released – or as I might say more casually: Jesus ascended into heaven, and is as present to you right now as he has ever been and ever will be

Thanks be to God, Amen.