

Many of you probably went to a university where one of the hot issues among students was, if the professor's late, how long do we have to wait? At one university custom dictated that if a professor was ten minutes late, class was canceled.

Well, a professor arrived early one morning for a 9:00 a.m. lecture. He placed his hat on his desk, and went to the faculty room. Before he knew it, it was 9:10. By the time he got back to his classroom, it was empty.

The next day, he let his students have it. *"When my hat is here," he fumed, "I'm here!"*

**The following day, the professor arrived at 9:00 a.m. He was met by the sight of 28 hats on 28 desks--and no students.**

**Today we celebrate the Ascension of Christ.** After Jesus' death and resurrection, he appeared to his followers many times over a period of forty days. **During his time with them, he taught them and he reassured them.** The apostles wanted to know if Jesus would now restore the kingdom to Israel, but he told them to leave that to God. He instructed them not to leave Jerusalem until they received a very special gift--**the baptism of the Holy Spirit**

**Receiving the Holy Spirit meant RECEIVING POWER.** The apostles would now be Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. In Christ's final appearance to them, they stood watching as Jesus **was taken up into Heaven in a CLOUD.** That is the event we celebrate today. **The Ascension of Jesus.**

**Notice the significance of the cloud.** Many Christians have difficulty with the *cosmology of the ascension.*

Pastor Bruce Melver tells about a six-year-old friend of his named Blair. Blair, he says, looks like a typical child, but talks like an adult. After church one Sunday, Blair asked Bruce if he could have a conference with him.

"Of course, Blair," Bruce replied, "I'd be happy to visit with you anytime." Blair responded, "First let me talk to my parents and see when they can bring me to your office. I'll give you a call. Thanks."

The six-year-old then shook hands with Bruce and walked away with the demeanor of a bank president who had just closed the deal. Bruce smiled and wondered, What's on his mind? Three days later Blair sat in Bruce's office. He came straight to the point. **"I have a question to ask you," he began.** "Fine, Blair, what's your question?" said Bruce.

**"How did that hole get in the sky?"** asked Blair. "I beg your pardon," Bruce stammered in uncertainty. "Well, Bruce, you remember it says in the Bible when Jesus was baptized 'the heavens opened.' Bruce gulped. Blair continued, ***"What I want to know is how did that hole get there?"***

**There are some things you can't explain to a six-year-old--or a sixty-year-old.** Scripture teaches us that Jesus ascended into the heavens. Well, where did he go? Does this mean that Heaven is a physical place, like earth, and so he flew like a rocket directly into the Pearly Gates?

When humans first began to launch space satellites, one well-meaning lady felt this would be the perfect way for us to discover heaven. She proposed that we figure out the exact day of the first Easter, add forty days to it to get to Ascension Day, then calculate the position of the earth on that day, then draw an imaginary line out from Jerusalem, with the confidence that this line would lead us to heaven. **After all, that was evidently how Jesus did it.**

Please do not take this passage too literally. Luke tells us in Acts that Jesus was ***"taken up into a cloud."*** As one writer notes, "this is the same cloud which led the Israelites in the wilderness. It is the same cloud which covered Mt. Sinai, and the Mount of the Transfiguration. ***"Being taken up in the cloud means that Jesus was taken up into the presence and person of God."*** He took his place at the right hand of God. He became one with the Trinity.

**Remember that, after his resurrection, Christ's body was changed in such a way that he could pass through closed doors.** Yet his disciples could still see the nail prints in his hands and feet. ***We don't know what kind of body this***

**was.** It was clearly different from a physical body. The Bible, when it says that Jesus was taken up in a cloud, does not mean that Jesus' body was propelled like a rocket through outer space until it came to a physical heaven. Jesus was now a spiritual body. We don't know what that means.

St. Paul, in I Corinthians 15, teaches us that when we die we are clothed with a new spiritual body, a body that is distinct from our physical body. Paul was obviously taking his cue from Christ's resurrection. **The disciples at Christ's ascension saw Christ's spiritual body taken up in a cloud and then they saw him no more.**

**REMEMBER...** *His ascension was spiritual, not physical.* This is all cloaked in mystery. But it affirms what we know about Christ. *He is risen and now he sits at the right hand of the Father.*

**Before Christ ascends,** however, he does two things. **First of all, he gives the disciples their assignment. They are to be his "witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

**You know the function of a witness.** Something extraordinary happens. How do you know it happened? Well, there were witnesses. *How is the world to know that God so loved the world that He gave His Son?* There are witnesses. There were several hundred of them two thousand years ago when it happened; there are millions more who have experienced the risen Christ in their lives here-and-now. **That is who we are. That is our task. TO BE WITNESSES.**

On January 2, 2006, in Sago, West Virginia, there was a coal mine explosion that trapped thirteen miners for nearly two days. Only one miner survived. His name was John Casto. He was interviewed a few days later on CNN.

*"I know the Lord was with us through it all,"* said John Casto, his voice breaking with sorrow and exhaustion. Then he talked about the hundreds of people who had been offering up prayers for the trapped miners in that little town.

*"You know,"* he said at the end of the interview, *"I'm not kin to none of those people under that hill over there, but each and every one of them is a brother to me, each and every one of them. Because you're my brother,"* he said, *turning to the startled CNN reporter, "and you're my brother,"* he said, turning to the cameraman, *"because I love Christ."*

**NOW THAT IS A WITNESS!!** Now that is not being showy. Or being phony. It is just a statement of fact about what John Casto has experienced in his life.

**Could you do that?** If not, why? Embarrassed? **Only willing to serve in Christ's army if you can be in the Secret Service?** Maybe you're not certain that Christ has risen from the dead. It's hard to witness to something about which you are not sure yourself. Maybe you've just been conditioned by our culture that religion should be a private matter, something you keep to yourself.

**I understand, but what do we do with Christ's final instruction to his disciples?** Would the faith still be alive today if everyone felt that it was a private matter that one should not discuss?

I wonder if some people aren't afraid of being a witness because of conditions in their own life. **What is it they say?** *"I would rather see a sermon than hear a sermon."* We don't want to appear hypocrites, witnessing for Jesus with our lips and betraying him with our lives. That is why the other thing that Christ did before he ascended is so important. **He promised to send his Holy Spirit.**

**"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised,** which you have heard me speak about." Then a few verses later he adds, **"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you . . ."**

Jesus knew that it would be difficult for his disciples to provide a living witness to their Master's death and resurrection. After all, they were to take their testimony to the ends of the earth. To everybody? Arabs? Jews? Africans? Asians? The barbarians living in the British Isles? Everybody? **YES, EVERYBODY!! It was a tall order. It seemed like an impossible assignment. That is why he promised them that they would not go about the task alone. His Holy Spirit would be with them.**

**“We think of the Holy Spirit as Comforter,”** says biblical scholar William Barclay, **“but the original meaning of the word ‘comfort’ was ‘with strength.’** The original meaning of COMFORT was to give courage to, to FILL WITH STRENGTH.”

**The Holy Spirit was coming to empower them to continue the work Christ had begun, the work Christ calls us to today.** Christ would not simply be leaving *his hat on the desk as a symbol of his presence.* He would be with them, closer than the very air they breathed.

In his best-selling book *Tuesdays With Morrie*, journalist Mitch Albom shares a particular conversation he had with his old mentor, professor Morrie Schwarz, before Morrie died of ALS. Mitch asked Morrie if he were afraid of being forgotten after his death. Morrie replied that he wasn’t worried about it. Recalling all the lives he had influenced, Morrie remarked, “. . . **LOVE IS HOW YOU STAY ALIVE, EVEN AFTER YOU ARE GONE.**”

And then professor Schwarz asked Mitch a question: **“Do you ever hear my voice sometimes when you’re back home? When you’re all alone?”** And Mitch answered **YES, of course he heard his old teacher’s voice. He had internalized Morrie’s voice, his values, his presence. Even after Morrie was gone, Mitch would still be guided by his presence.**

**So, would it be with the disciples, but in a more personal and intense way.**

**The Holy Spirit would be with them. Just as the Holy Spirit is with us today.**

I don’t know what your life situation is. I don’t know what giant you are facing today.

**BUT I DO KNOW THIS... YOU ARE NOT ALONE!!**

**Christ has ascended to the Father. And he has sent us his Holy Spirit to BOTH Comfort & Empower US!**

**SO—REMEMBER, Nothing is impossible in this Life if God is with us. Amen!**