

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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At some point, I lost heaven. I can't remember exactly when that was. Suddenly I reached into the void. The sky was gone. I continued to search for a while, a little deeper, between the folds - or on the other side? No. My sky, the little piece of the puzzle, sky blue with cloud white - had disappeared.

For years, this piece of sky accompanied me to every church service. I took it with me to an art exhibition about twenty years ago and later put it in the left pocket of my gown at home.

The puzzle piece is part of the exhibition "Peace is Power" by the artist Yoko Ono. "Helmets" is the name of an installation in this exhibition. Numerous military helmets hang from the ceiling on delicate strings. Open at the top, like bowls. Each helmet is filled with two handfuls of sky, puzzle pieces.

We should take them with us, every visitor a piece of heaven. This is how the sky should spread and grow worldwide. Like the vision: Peace is Power.

And later on, I took Yoko Ono's idea further in a completely different way.

We made sky puzzle. Drawing first. Then pieces with Sunday school kids and then at a family service, ecumenically and outdoor, we shared Baskets full of pieces of the sky puzzle were passed around and everyone took one.

You are heaven. Heaven sends you. Together we are the ones who realize something of heaven on earth. And there we sat, high above the city, with

nothing but the sky above us. Sometimes it's so simple, it could be so simple: All under the same sky. Worldwide. And: peace is power.

Jesus appears again and again after the resurrection; he meets the disciples and talks to them. He promises them power from heaven, the power of the Holy Spirit, which will come upon them.

“And when he had said this, he was lifted up before their eyes, and a cloud took him away from before their eyes. And as they looked after him as he ascended into heaven, behold, two men stood by them in white robes. They said, "Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking up to heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Hey, there are all the disciples and families, many of them... and all together under one sky and sometimes under one roof... It's easy to forget. Ascension - that's this big story – we see it here on our stained glass window, heaven, cloud, angels, unbelievable - and then? Then we go home. Back to the others. And the skywatchers bring back all the pieces of the puzzle from heaven. For the disciples and the many others. They reconnect, heaven grows, they stick together and grow in experience: The good news is spreading: Christ is risen and here in my life . Always. Like the sky above me.

I think that's great. A real reason to celebrate. But there is also something sad and disturbing about the story at the beginning.

Their Jesus leaves them. Again. For good. They have only just had him with them again and are listening to him, gaining new confidence in life. They feel safer and more comfortable in their own skin again... That's how I imagine it.

They realize: Everything that happened with Jesus was not a fake, not a mistake. Everything was as it was. It was real.

I find this feeling very precious. Someone dies and the questions come. Are my memories correct, what was he or she like, did we know each other? Sometimes the departure of someone calls into question everything that went before. Or also: something bad that has happened erases everything good from before. As if it had never happened.

The Ascension story helps me here.

It's about looking behind and staying behind. Both belong together.

There are two sides to both. One sad, one comforting.

Looking behind when someone leaves. I get sad when you leave, I worry, will you come back, will everything go well - and will I be able to cope on my own... That's one side.

The other: I realize my heart is beating as I look after you, the way you walk is familiar to me, I remember paths we have walked together. Suddenly it's all there. Our closeness. We experienced something together and - that remains. Even when you're gone. We. Are. Here.

And there's something else... Up there on the mountain or here in the pews, there's not just one person looking after Jesus. They are standing there looking together. It's good to have someone with you who has also experienced all of this. Someone who was there and needs comfort like me - that alone is comforting.

And we can stand there. We have experienced the same and different things, love and grief and pain, we are always just as overwhelmed in life as the Ascension disciples. And we miss God with us.

Walking in the sky - Yoko Ono II

Do you remember her sky puzzle pieces? Yoko Ono has also written several text miniatures, pieces of heaven, as she calls them.

Sky piece number ten sounds like this:

'The sky is not just above our heads.

It stretches down to the earth.

Whenever we lift our foot from the ground,

we are walking in the sky¹.

Perhaps, dear readers, you will go for a walk or hike today. Then think consciously: with every step I take, I am also walking in heaven. Whenever we lift our foot off the ground, we are walking in heaven. On all our paths: Jesus is with us, heaven, God, and so we also remain connected to all our dead.

One foot in heaven, the other on earth. Here too: Christ ascended to heaven / What does he send down to us? Up, down... Above and below are connected. It is not an either/or.

¹ Yoko Ono, Acorn, Berlin 2014, Haffmans&Tolkemitt GmbH.

Our walk on earth, the day-to-day and the difficult nights - they don't just happen under God's heaven, they happen in God's heaven. Christ wants to be our comfort. Hallelujah.

With the old words from this Ascension chorale, we look once again to heaven. By now we know that this is allowed.

Christ ascended to heaven/What does he send down to us/The Comforter, the Holy Spirit...

God sends the power of the Holy Spirit. Suddenly everything happens at the same time: Ascension and Pentecost. The church year always puts the festivals in the right order. One follows the other. That is orderly and makes good sense. Because we follow a path and everything develops in life. And yet everything is always there, everything happens at the same time, next to each other, within each other. And for each and every one of us in our own rhythm and at our own time. This also has to do with the back and forth between heaven and earth.

Jesus disappears. The power of the spirit comes. Christ wants to be our comfort. One dies. Love remains. A world comes to an end. You still get up in the morning and go about your day, always lifting one foot off the ground.

You cannot lose heaven forever.

In the cantata for Ascension Day by Johann Sebastian Bach, they sing in the opening chorus:

On Christ's Ascension alone/I base my following/and all doubt, fear and torment/I always overcome...

My journey home, discipleship. We are here. Like the first disciples and all those who follow. Together we look up to heaven, again and again, become sad and hallelujah-joyful and go on.

AMEN