

Sermon for Sunday, June 1, 2014 (First Sunday after the Ascension) Acts 1:6-14 "Somewhere Over the Rainbow"

The story of the ascension is one of those stories that really strains credulity. Jesus has died, has been laid in the tomb, has come back from the dead and has had several interactions with the disciples at various locations. He has told them he is going to be with his heavenly Father, but will come back. We hear in the reading from Acts that he is carried up to heaven on a cloud, in the presence of a few of the disciples.

And, oh by the way, a couple of angels – those guys in the white robes – show up and tell the disciples "Why are you looking up? Jesus went up there, and he'll come back in the same way."

Then the disciples who had witnessed this whole thing go back to the upper room to tell the others.

Wild story, eh? Hard to believe. Not even Hollywood would green-light a script with a plot line like that.

And we people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century who are all about provable scientific stuff hear a story like this and say "Nah...couldn't be. Must just be a poetic image, a metaphor, something like that."

And then we start to feel guilty, because all of our religious training tells us we are supposed to believe that Jesus Christ ascended to heaven.

Here's the good news: you are not alone. Even the disciples who witnessed Jesus' ascension were caught staring upwards as if they were hypnotized, wondering if they really saw what they saw. And we, who didn't even get the benefit of seeing it, are supposed to believe.

I guess for some of us, we get the feeling that if we struggle with believing some of the stories of Jesus' miracles – and this one is the big one – we aren't very good Christians. And that leads to a downward spiral of "well, if I can't believe this and that makes me a bad Christian, why do I even bother?"

Not a good place to be, to be sure.

I've got an antidote for you. It's a song. Not a hymn, not a praise song. Not an oratorio. Not a motet.

No, it's a piece of Tin Pan Alley and motion picture history...Harold Arlen's "Somewhere Over the Rainbow."

In recent years there have been some beautiful covers of it: Eva Cassidy's, one of my favorites. The slack key guitar Hawaiian version by ISRAEL KAMAKAWIWO'OLE, which interwove "What a Wonderful World" with the "Wizard of Oz" favorite.

Yes, it's a popular song. No, it wasn't written as a song about faith.

And yet it is, at its heart, about the stretch for belief in something wonderful that seems beyond possibility for the singer.

"Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high, there's a land that I heard of once in a lullaby."

A land beyond our vision, a place we may have only heard of in stories, not somewhere we've been...

"Somewhere over the rainbow skies are blue, and the dreams that I dare to dream really do come true."

A place where strange and wonderful possibilities are real, even if they don't make much sense...

"Someday I'll wish upon a star and wake up where the clouds are far behind me, where troubles melt like lemon drops away above the chimney tops, that's where you'll find me."

A chance for a different reality, a more beautiful way of being, in a place where we can go...

We hear the song and we are transported by it. The quotidian is put aside. Miracles can happen. We can be in another place.

We believe.

We think "why not? Couldn't it just maybe be possible?"

Consider the notion that there are things that make no sense, and yet they happen. Consider the possibility that surprising events occur, and we suspend our disbelief in the face of those events. We don't always demand scientific proof. Sometimes we are just amazed.

Like the disciples standing there staring up at the sky, wondering what just happened. Like the ones who were back in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, who heard about it second-hand.

Like the moment when we realize that we don't understand why we believe our partner loves us...we just believe in that love.

Like the moment when we sense God's presence, even though it isn't anything like what we imagined it would be...we just sense it and believe in it.

Like the moment when we can imagine ourselves over the rainbow, not so unlike the risen Lord carried up on a cloud to the heavens...we don't know why it seems possible, but somehow even though it is impossible by all the rules of science and our own experience, it makes a strange sort of sense.

Belief is hard, particularly when we try to use the tools of the modern world to prove things. But when we let our minds soar, over the rainbow perhaps, we move to a place of openness to the possibility. We don't have to believe perfectly, if there is such a thing. We just have to imagine believing, and we are transformed. Over a rainbow, beyond disbelief. Into the larger world that Christ inhabits, more than we can comprehend. And that is enough for now.

Amen.