

'If I do not go ...'

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"If I do not go, the Spirit will not come to you." John 16:7

The sight-impaired woman who rides the bus with her black lab companion is greeted by the other regulars. She occasions a running conversation, a brief communion on the 57 before everyone disperses to their jobs, other destinations. A child sits with her mother and reads aloud from a picture book. Cars swarm around the bus in traffic, their drivers on cell phones, drinking their morning coffee. We pass empty storefronts, a corner building with real estate signs, the home of a faltering community radio station, another victim of the stressed economy.

It must have been stressful for the disciples to know that Jesus had to leave for the Spirit to come. This was the crucial interval between Ascension and Pentecost. His historical presence had to give way to the unbounded flow of his spirit and mission into the church. Jesus would remain in the world, not focused here or there, but in us. We would not be able to enshrine or control him, build a religion around him. He was already disappearing into the world, hidden in the poor, waiting to be served, accessible but never guaranteed by piety or private virtue alone. Because he had turned the world upside down, his ascent was really a descent, downward mobility into the world, where the only clue to his whereabouts would be human need. We hear the gospel ourselves when hear it proclaimed at the edges, in the cracks, wherever life is thick with ordinary traffic and communion. Jesus is on the bus because we are on the bus.

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