

## TWENTY - ONE – SIX HIKE

Exodus 20:1-6

Pastor Rob's advice to me before he took off for New York City was, "You better make the Sunday Night Live @ 5 very creative or everyone will be sitting there thinking about the GAME rather than listening to you." So my first thought was to pick two captains, have them choose up sides, and go out to the parking lot for a game of Christian football – where in Christian compassion and grace you let the other team score every time. But then I checked with Dave Turner, President of Hawthorn Bank – since they own the parking lot – and he vetoed the idea – something about liability insurance since some of us may not be in optimal football playing shape. In your defense I argued for hours that we are ALL in optimal football playing shape – but I lost the battle.

Then it came to me – a memory from the distant past. I remembered back almost twenty years ago – when I was thrust - for the first time - in front of a computer which – for hours stared back at me blankly – and with fear and trepidation I pushed some keys. To this day I don't remember which keys – maybe some strange combination of escape, backspace, percent sign and upside-down question mark – and suddenly there appeared on my machine a message. It took me a few minutes to realize that I was gazing upon a top-secret communiqué from Galah to his king Melek. I will never know how my second hand - given by a church member who was going to toss it out computer - intercepted this message – but I soon learned that I would intercept more – about one per month – and I started printing them in the church's newsletter! Galah, I came to find out, was a spy sent from the planet of Upiter – a tiny, still undiscovered planet hidden behind its much larger, sister planet Jupiter. There is life – intelligent life on the planet of Upiter – and the King of Upiter, Melek, had sent Galah to our earth – with the assignment to investigate to see if there was any intelligent life here – a difficult assignment, some would say – and report back through some sophisticated system once per month. It was these monthly reports that my antiquated computer somehow intercepted.

Now, none of this is relevant to today – except – except one communiqué I received in mid February of that first year. And although it was nearly twenty years ago, its message may be timely. This was the message from Galah to the king of Upiter, Melek....

Dear Melek,

I have spent considerable time during these past months studying the religious practices of the people of earth. It has been quite confusing – so much different from Upiter where we all believe as you do, O Gracious, Kind and Almighty King. Here, it seems, the earthlings have many religions and worship many "gods". During these past few weeks I have paid particular attention to one group of religious folks here through their season of preparation for their holiest day – their day of greatest joy and celebration – and worship. It has been intriguing – yet also confusing – to watch – and I may have some of the details wrong, but here is what I have witnessed.

Each Sunday huge crowds gather in their "sanctuaries" to worship their gods. There is much joy and celebration in these gatherings as males and females alike are dressed in "appropriates clothes" in honor of their gods. They remain seated for much of the time, watching intently all that is happening before them, but from time to time rise up together in what might we described as a shout or song of praise – or it may be what I have heard by some explain as an "ecstatic moment of joy". These weekly celebrations during this season lead up to one glorious day – often referred to as a "Super" day, and on this day the crowds swell well beyond the usual number of worshippers, and the enthusiasm is beyond anything I have seen in my 1284 years on our own planet. On that day, not only do the worshippers of

this particular sect gather in a huge sanctuary, but other adherents gather in homes and places they call “sports bars” and consume huge volumes of food and drink – it appears to be some sort of ritualistic feasting which lasts for three hours or more – and then some have difficulty navigating their vehicles back to their homes. It appears that a servant of this religion known as the “pizza delivery man” is an invaluable disciple in this sacrament.

But it is the object – or I should say, objects - of their worship which intrigues me the most. On a large field in the middle of their sanctuary are huge men with bulging muscles – and bellies – and wearing clothing with various numbers on them and helmets with various designs – the particular ones this year – on the day of February 4 in this year of 2002 – seem to be Patriots, symbols of this particular nation’s earlier inhabitants and Rams, a type of beast with horns. The adherents of this religion shout their praises as these huge men run into the sanctuary – yes, I say run, although I know that running is never permitted in our sanctuaries – and some of the adherents seem to shout for those in one color of clothing and others for the huge men in the other color of clothing. I can only speculate that these figures, who look like human men, must be gods and that what takes place in this religious field is either a reenactment of some long ago battle between the gods of the earth – or an actual battle between two “teams” of gods competing for the loyalty of the people. There is a very sacred object involved – called a “foot ball” – and every one of the gods wants the “foot ball” and will do harm to any other god who happens to hold the “foot ball” at any given moment. Sometimes, rather than being harmed by others, one of the gods will throw the “foot ball” away – and others will run frantically to retrieve it, and if they do, they will be pounded to the ground by other gods. At the same time, some of the gods seem to have little or no interest in this sacred object, and merely push and shove and do all manner of harm upon the gods dressed differently. I know that you, great King Melek, are finding this as difficult to understand as I am, but I am accurately reporting what I have observed. This worship lasts for three or four earth hours, and then there is a sort of closing ceremony in which a man – I assume a priest – comes into the midst of one group of the gods and presents them with a gold replica of the sacred object of “foot ball”. The worshippers shout loud words of praise – except that some worshippers seem to be upset, even angry – and then all depart from the sanctuary.

I had hoped, dear Melek, to go on to the field, or into the special rooms into which the huge men/gods went and talk with them, but I was not permitted to do so. In fact when I tried to do so I was violently tossed out – I can only surmise that they somehow mistook me for another god and attacked me as they did those on the field.

So my work in investigating the religious life of the earthling is not complete. I will do all I can to discover why many of the people on earth worship these particular gods.

Nan nu, Nan nu,

Your servant, Galah

Why do many on earth worship these particular gods? Or any god other than the One, true God – Creator, Son and Spirit? “Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, you shall have no other gods before me.” But we do – our presence here tonight may indicate that the Patriots and Giants – they’re the two teams playing in the Super Bowl – our presence may indicate that those particular gods are not “our gods”. But we have them. Those things to which we give our loyalty, those things which we worship, those things which we honor above the one, true God.

So tonight, and every night, we confess our failure to worship one God alone, and we rededicate ourselves to loving and serving this one God above all else, made known to us in one human alone, Jesus Christ – who gave his life for us. Amen.