This Sunday, I'm presenting a sermon about spring. While preparing, I got stuck on one point. Why would Jesus -- or anyone else for that matter -- want to ascend into heaven where it is cold and empty? Why wouldn't he (or we) prefer to descend into heaven where the snuggling warmth of the Earth's interior is more in keeping with the warming of spring?

I do not address the spiritual resurrection, which is altogether a different matter. Nor do I address the arbitrary symbolism of "up" being good and "bad" being down. What concerns me is that a few people might have been conditioned to believe that "up there" is physically better than "down there."

Of course I'd rather fly through the atmosphere on angel wings than dig through the dirt with the claws of a mole. But if you ascended high enough, your wings would cease to function: There's nothing for them to flap against in the vacuum of outer space. That's one reason engineers don't put wings on interplanetary spacecraft.

And except for the stars, most of heaven is as dark as an earthly night. It's also brutally cold because the molecules are far apart. Radiation zaps you from every direction as if a spray of invisible bullets. Asteroids come at you like misshapen cannonballs.

But the worst thing about a lofty physical heaven for me would be the emptiness. The farther up you go, the farther apart you become from everything else. Indeed, the highest of heavens would be the loneliest for social creatures like us, misanthropes excluded.

There are problems with an underworld heaven as well. First, it's even darker. It's also brutally cold, the pressure is crushing, and there's nothing to breathe. But on the positive side, everything is more stable, even considering the shaking from earthquakes. In fact, there's no such thing as day or night, and the local temperature stays the same for practically forever.

Moreover, in contrast to heaven, the further down you go, the closer together everything gets. At the exact center of the earth, there's no north, south, east, or west. Up is the only direction possible. Surrounding you would be something resembling stainless steel.

Given the choice, I'd rather have my physical atoms and my spiritual "atoms" stay in the same place after death. I don't want either to be in a cold, empty, lonely place, or to be in a hot, crowded place where nothing seems to happen. The place I want for my physical post-life "retirement" home is the place where daffodils are reborn from the dead each year, the place where I was conceived from someone else's atoms, the soil, the zero point with respect to the up and down geometry of the afterlife.

The best part about spending eternity there is the constant recycling and sharing that takes place. Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust, or something like that. If I've borrowed atoms from nature to become the physical me, then it's only fair that I return them, as if they were library books I thoroughly enjoyed.

I've already willed my useful organs to the living because I won't need them any more. I hope that any particularly useful tissues will go to medical students, so that I can help them learn to heal, even after I'm gone.

Most of the physical me, however, will go to my family for them to do with whatever is best for them, provided they don't pickle me for posterity. I'm quite sure they will respect my wishes to return at
least a few of my atoms to the soil so they can be used by whoever or whatever needs them, in
order that life can fulfill it's destiny.

The great American poet, Walt Whitman, would likely share my sentiments about pushing up daisies
in the afterlife. Otherwise he would not have written "And what I assume you shall assume, For
every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

Heaven on high? No thanks. Heaven down below? No thanks: almost as bad. Heaven on Earth?
Now you're talking!

IT'S GOING UNDER ONE MORE REASON TO STOP POURING MONEY INTO DOOMED CITY: