

Sermon for The Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Date: August 26, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

First Reading: Revelation 7:1-4, 9-17

Epistle Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Gospel Reading: Matthew 25:31-46



Sermon Title: Good News: There is a Life That Never Ends

Introit: Psalm 23:2-6; Antiphon: Psalm 23:1

Hymns:

LSB 516 – Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying

LSB 748 – I'm But a Stranger Here

LSB 509 – Christ is Surely Coming

Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151



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Grace to you and peace in Jesus' name. Amen.

I have been your pastor now for about a year and a half. During the time I have been here we have sent 14 of our members home. That would be a very sad thought if it were not for the reason you good people called me here. You, through the work of the Holy Spirit, and through prayer, called me here to bring God's Word, its blessings for what is right, and its curses for what is wrong, to you.

Now it might seem a little strange to mark the passage of time by counting those who are no longer here with us, but it has something to do with what this, the last in a series of ten sermons, is really about. Throughout this series we've learned who God is. How God has saved us. How He brings His blessings and forgiveness to us. We've learned all about what it really means to be a Christian. So what's left?

This last sermon is called, "Good News: There is a Life That Never Ends." That is a perspective that is too often lost on us. We are always concerned about the moment, or the day, forgetting about God's promises. Promises like:

Luke 12:6-7 Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? God doesn't forget any of them. Even every hair on your head has been counted. Don't worry! You are worth more than many sparrows.

We are in fact the reason there are sparrows and everything else that exists in all of creation. God made all of it for us. We are His most precious, His most loved, children. He wants us to live. Yet all of us die. We die because that is what sin does to us. Sin really is far more than simply the bad stuff we do. Sin is a terminal disease. It affects not just our spiritual nature, it affects our physical body. Its attack is ceaseless and relentless. At some point in our life it wins and we die.

What happens when we die? What happens at that moment?

Ecclesiastes 12:7 The dust of mortals goes back to the ground as it was before and the spirit goes back to God who gave it.

Luke 23:42-43 [*The criminal crucified with Jesus*] said, "Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom." Jesus said to him, "I can guarantee this truth: Today you will be with me in paradise."

1 Peter 3:19 [*Jesus*] went to proclaim his victory to the spirits kept in prison.

John 6:40 [*Jesus said,*] "My Father wants all those who see the Son, and believe in him, to have eternal life. He wants me to bring them back to life on the last day."

Angels are only spirit, though God does give them bodies temporarily on occasion to visit us. A human being however is two things, both body and spirit. At death the physical body dies, and the soul or spirit, continues on. That spirit goes before God's Throne of Judgment and is condemned eternally Hell, or welcomed eternally into Heaven. While this happens the body decays and returns to the dust from which it was made.¹ That, however is not the end. There is a day we call the Last Day, or Judgment Day. On that day Jesus Christ will return in glory and power. On that day He will raise our bodies up, restore them to the perfection they were meant to

1 Genesis 3:19

be, and restore our spirit with our bodies. Then we will live as fully human, both body and soul, forever.

Heaven and Hell are physical places where we will have physical bodies. We do not turn into angels being only spirit. We are from the Judgment Day, on into eternity physical beings, having a physical resurrection, just like Jesus.² How did Jesus rise?

John 20:27 Jesus said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Take your hand, and put it into my side. Stop doubting, and believe.”

Romans 6:5 If we’ve become united with him in a death like his, certainly we will also be united with him, when we come back to life as he did.

John 5:28-29 Don’t be surprised at what I’ve just said. A time is coming when all the dead will hear his voice, and they will come out of their tombs. Those who have done good will come back to life and live, but those who have done evil will come back to life and will be judged.

Job 19:25-27 I know that my redeemer lives, and afterwards, he will rise on the earth. Even after my skin has been destroyed, I will see God in my own flesh. I will see him with my own eyes, not with someone else’s.

On the Last Day all the dead will hear Jesus’ command to rise as He returns in the glory and might of the Son of God. All will be commanded to come out of their graves. The sea will give up its dead.³ All will be reunited with their soul. Then in those physical bodies each will go to the place they have been judged to go. Heaven for those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord. Hell for those who rejected that grace. From that Judgment Day on these two groups of people will never cross paths again.

That is why the things we do here are so important. Though we do have to live in this world, and care for ourselves, our families and those who live around us, we are only travelers here. We are foreigners living in a foreign land. As important as things may appear to be in this life they are all nothing when compared to the life that is to come.

Listen to what the Bible says:

Philippians 3:7-8 These things that I once considered valuable I now consider worthless for Christ. It is far more than that! I consider everything else worthless because I am much better off knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. It is because of him that I think of everything as worthless. I threw it all away in order to gain Christ.

It really is important that we keep the important things important. Here’s why. I have a few quotes of people’s last words that I think might drive this point home. The first is Thomas Paine. When our country was being founded he wanted a country where God was banished from the schools and the general public square. He wrote a book putting forward that idea. The book was called “The Age of Reason.”

On his death bed he said:



2 Romans 6:5

3 Revelation 20:13

“I would give worlds if I had them, that *'The Age of Reason'* had never been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! O God, what have I done to suffer so much? But there is no God! But if there should be, what will become of me hereafter? Stay with me, for God's sake! Send even a child to stay with me, for it is Hell to be alone. If ever the Devil had an agent, I have been that one.”



The next is Francis Voltaire. Another man who sought freedom from religion rather than freedom of religion. On his death bed he said:

“I am abandoned by God and man! I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months' life. Then I shall go to Hell; and you will go with me. O Christ! O Jesus Christ!”⁴

Though it is certainly true that not all atheists die afraid or calling out to Jesus these two did and their actions are not alone. I am always reluctant to over generalize any group of people, but I have never met a happy atheist. I'm sure they exist, but I've met many people who claim to be atheists. They are all angry. They are angry because God's Laws and truths are written on the hearts of all people⁵ and they are in constant combat with that truth.

Compare their last words with two others. Dwight Moody a famous preacher said:

“I see earth receding. Heaven is opening. God is calling!”



Also Adroniram Judson a great American missionary to Burma said:



“I go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school. I feel so strong in Christ.”

I have been at the death beds of many Christians. I am always reluctant to over generalize any group of people, but I have never been at the death bed of a frightened Christian. I'm sure it happens, but God's Laws and truths are written on the hearts of all people, and they are able to lie back and rest in the arms of the God who loves them knowing they are going home.

So then what will it be like on Judgment Day? The Bible says:

Matthew 10:28 Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

Mark 16:16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

4 Voltaire once said of Jesus, “Curse the wretch!” He stated, “Every sensible man, every honorable man, must hold the Christian sect in horror ...Christianity is the most ridiculous, the most absurd and bloody religion that has ever infected the world.” He also boasted, “In twenty years Christianity will be no more. My single hand shall destroy the edifice it took twelve apostles to rear.” Some years after his death, Voltaire's house was used by the Geneva Bible Society to print Bibles.

5 Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:16

Isaiah 66:24 *[God says]* They will go out and look at the corpses of those who have rebelled against me. The worms that eat them will not die. The fire that burns them will not go out.

Matthew 7:13-14 *[Jesus said,]* “Enter through the narrow gate because the gate and road that lead to destruction are wide. Many enter through the wide gate, but the narrow gate, and the road that lead to life, are full of trouble. Only a few people find the narrow gate.

Everyone, all believers and unbelievers, will stand before the Judgment Throne of Christ our Lord. There each will be judged alone for their own actions. John the disciple was told what that day would be like when he wrote about the “books,” and the “Book of Life.”

Revelation 20:11-15 I saw a large, white throne and the one who was sitting on it. The earth and the sky fled from his presence but no place was found for them. I saw the dead, both important and unimportant people, standing in front of the throne. Books were opened, including the Book of Life. The dead were judged on the basis of what they had done, as recorded in the books. The sea gave up its dead. Death and Hell gave up their dead. People were judged based on what they had done. Death and Hell were thrown into the fiery lake. (The fiery lake is the second death.) Those whose names were not found in the Book of Life were thrown into the fiery lake.

Everything you have ever done is recorded in the Books. Nothing is missing. There is no negotiation. There is no way to twist thing to your favor. There’s no lawyer to get you off. It’s all there, and you know better than anyone, you are guilty. However for the believer the blood of Christ covers all of your sins. Every sinful thing you’ve done, knowingly or unknowingly, is blotted out by Jesus’ blood for those who believe. Their name is found in the Book of Life.

For those who rejected Jesus’ free gift of salvation the record stands. Their names are not recorded in the Book of Life and for them there is no hope. They die “the second death.” That death that is eternal separation from God. They are why Isaiah’s words are so frightening when he says:

Isaiah 66:24 The worms that eat them will not die. The fire that burns them will not go out.

Heaven and Hell are very real, very physical, very eternal places. Once you are judged there is no leaving either place, forever. Which is why it is written:

Psalms 84:10 One day in your courtyards is better than a thousand anywhere else. I would rather be a doorman in God’s house than live inside wicked people’s homes.

The worst of Heaven is infinitely better than the best Hell has to offer. Which lead us to the question what will Heaven be like? Much of that is a mystery. We are not told all that much about Heaven. I suppose a lot of that is the suspense, the surprise, the intrigue. God wants it to be a surprise like it is for kids on Christmas Day. Yet there are a few glimpses. He does give us little peaks, for those of you who couldn’t wait until Christmas day and had to sneak out in the night to peek under the tree. (You know who you are!)

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are God's children. What we will be isn't completely clear yet. We do know that when Christ appears we will be like him because we will see him as he is.

Revelation 21:1-5 I saw a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and earth had disappeared, and the sea was gone. Then I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, dressed like a bride ready for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "God lives with people! God will make his home with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There won't be any more death. There won't be any grief, crying, or pain, because the first things have disappeared."

The one sitting on the throne said, "I am making everything new." He said, "Write this: 'These words are faithful and true.'"

Psalms 16:11 You make the path of life known to me. Complete joy is in your presence. Pleasures are by your side forever.

Romans 8:18-19 I consider our present sufferings insignificant compared to the glory that will soon be revealed to us. All creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal who his children are.

There are more. There are glimpses of the Throne Room of God, and little didats and narpets of all kinds, but the truth is you'll just have to wait to see. I personally like to explain it this way. Have you ever walked in the woods or watched a sunset. The Lord took only six days on this creation, and sin and sin's affect have been tearing at it for thousands of years. Just imagine what He can do with a couple thousand years! Imagine what a world untouched by sin might be like. We can't imagine that because we've never known it. The wonder is that we will have eternity to explore it, and live under His eternal perfect care.

You know that all might sound a little intimidating. Living, physically, forever. What will we do? How will we live? Will we have families? Will we recognize our loved ones? Will we get board? What if someone sins? Can a person sin in Heaven? What if I sin?

We will have stuff to do, jobs and vocations. We will remember and recognize not only our loved ones but many others as well. Just think of all the faithful you might like to meet. People like Able, Noah, or Moses. Maybe Deborah the judge, or Mary Magdalene and so many many others. There will be time to meet and greet them all.

God has made us a promise. There will be peace, joy, comfort, and utter freedom from everything and anything sinful. Sin and sin's affect will never ever touch you again.

What does a world free from sin look like? I don't know. I suppose it would be impossible for us to imagine because we live in a world so utterly stained by sin. The point is God has made you a promise and God does not lie. It will be wonderful. You will not be disappointed.

Amen.