

3rd Sunday of Advent – Heaven

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Introduction – Many Rooms in heaven but Jesus has Prepared them all

Good morning!

Heaven is a word which conjures up many and varied images, there are songs about it, TV shows and films usually depicting it as a world on a cloud with angels floating around playing harps, one of my favourites was from a Simpsons episode where God told Homer Simpson the meaning of life which he promptly forgot probably due to a large Dohnut or some other of his favourite foods.

Why don't you all take a minute to talk to someone next to you about how you see Heaven?

There are many different ideas about what heaven will be like and I think that's Ok as in the Gospel Jesus talks about his Father's house having many rooms, and who's to say that every room is decorated the same?

Characteristics of Heaven

It is interesting that we tend to have a rather dramatic image of heaven, and the book of Revelation certainly paints a vivid picture. Yet in our gospel reading today, Jesus presents heaven very personally and very intimately. According to Jesus, 'God' is 'My Father', and heaven is simply, yet profoundly, 'My Father's House'. Home. Following Jesus' example in 'The Lord's Prayer', we also refer to God as 'our Father', so for us, heaven should first and foremost be about being in God's company, and entering into God's presence.

In the gospel of John, Jesus, just before his arrest, prays for his disciples and defines heaven as this: 'Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and me, whom you have sent'. Knowing God through Jesus is therefore key to understanding eternal life. The idea of eternal life is difficult to grasp, and we may well echo's Thomas' confusion when he questions Jesus about it. But Jesus responds, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father but through me'. Jesus appears to be presenting himself as the key to heaven. What does Jesus mean by this?

In today's Gospel reading Jesus is reassuring his disciples in the light of his upcoming death, resurrection, and ascension that they will be re-united. He instructs them: Do not worry. Do not fear. Do not let your hearts be troubled. How much of our lives do we spend worrying about things? Quite often these worries are well-founded as there are very real pressures that we face: the worry of paying bills; the pressure of doing our work well; the fear of not being a good enough spouse/ partner/ child, and the very real fear of death, despite its guarantee! Jesus gives us reason not to worry, for his

resurrection will prove to the disciples that death is not the end. For us today, Jesus gives us further reason not to worry, for he has become our peace. As he reassures his disciples in today's passage: 'My peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you'. Death is no longer something to dread since it is likened to a home-coming, which means that there will be something comfortable and familiar about it.

Here Jesus is saying to us 'Don't worry about me leaving you here because I'm going to my father's house to get it ready for you, there you will never have to worry about anything again'. So already a picture of the Principles of Heaven is beginning to Form... In Heaven there is no more Fear or worry. But there is more yet to come Not only will there be no more fear and worry but Jesus Himself will walk among us wiping away every tear. When I was a teenager after my Mum left, I would sometimes sit at my Bedroom window crying, wishing that someone would just notice how sad I was and would give me a hug and tell me everything would be alright. I'm sure there are many people here today who can relate to that story, at times in our lives we can feel alone sometimes at the worst possible moments. But what Great news this is let me read it to you.

³And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,⁴and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

In heaven Jesus will walk among in the rooms he has prepared for us wiping away every tear from our past. All those times we felt alone, hurt, misunderstood will be healed in the beauty of his embrace.

Practices on Earth (How on earth do we do that?)

This is amazing stuff but is it all in the future? Well no is the simple answer to that. Jesus Often says in the Gospels, 'the kingdom of heaven is near at hand'. And in the Lord's Prayer he taught us to say 'your kingdom come on Earth as it is in Heaven'. So how on earth do we do that? (Pardon the pun). A King is in charge of a kingdom, and God's kingdom is reflected in God's rule on earth. God's kingdom on earth is thus when the characteristics of heaven are practiced on earth. Heaven can begin for each one of us whenever we enter into God's presence. Heaven can begin for us each time we come to peace with God. Heaven can begin for others each time we are able to share God's peace with others.

As individuals I'm sure we can all think of ways we can bring some of heaven to earth in our daily lives, a simple smile can sometimes mean the world, that unexpected cup of tea, or an offer to help.

Together as the church in this area we can work together to bring Gods kingdom here on earth. Together we can do things not possible on our own. Have you noticed the front of the church? It has been cleaned by 3 men from Newbury house on Daisy bank lane, with a jet washer provided by Desmond from an idea someone else had. Or the Children's Christmas party last week, so many people all came together to show something of the love of God to the children of this area.

During Advent we await the coming of our Lord and Jesus, my hope and prayer is that when He comes he see's he's home already.