

Sermon - Glimpses of Heaven - For all the Saints - 11-1-20  
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For the past two weeks we have been talking about glimpses of heaven. We have been looking to scripture and personal experience to learn more about what Heaven is like. Today we are going to apply what we have learned. We are going to ask what Heaven means to us, not just “bye and bye in the sky”, but here and now, today.

Certainly Heaven will not become fully real until we die and find ourselves raised to be with Christ. But for now, at least for me, Heaven becomes most real when someone I care about dies and I find myself mourning their loss. It is true. Even those of us who have the hope of Heaven mourn when a loved one dies. I discovered that anew a few weeks ago. As you may recall my father died a little over a year ago. He was in his 90's; in a good deal of pain; and had thankfully accepted the Lord near the end. He was ready to go, to be with God, to find a healing that the doctors could no longer provide. In his case death was a blessing. I thanked God when his suffering came to an end. Still, after my father passed I found myself mourning his loss.

However, that was over a year ago. I thought I was done mourning Dad, that I had put it all behind me. Then my step mother asked that **my brother, sister and I come to the ranch** to go through Dad's stuff. We spent two days looking at old pictures and memorabilia, the remains of a life time. It was good, but it was also hard. I found myself mourning Dad all over again, but I consoled myself with the hope that he was not really gone, that he was healed and with Jesus, and that I would see him again. Which led me to wonder how those who do not believe in Heaven, who think that their loved ones are gone forever, are able to cope with the loss.

Paul wrote of the importance of having such hope. He wrote: **Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. — 1 Thes. 4:13-18**

I, for one, take great encouragement from Paul's words. You see, at least for me, funerals are celebrations, all-be-it bitter sweet ones. Funerals are a bit like graduation parties. As parents one of the happiest, proudest moments in our lives is when our **child walks down the aisle** and graduates from school. And yet, even as we beam in pride, tears run down our cheeks. For we know that our little boy or girl has moved on to another season in their lives. They will no longer be with us. This is what we raised them for, what we prayed for, but it is still very, very hard to say goodbye, and give them the freedom to move on to the new life for which they were intended.

This has not been an easy year at Central Church. We have lost folks who were dear to us, many of whom we named earlier in the service. In many cases COVID kept us from gathering as a church to celebrate their lives and mourn together. But, whether they had a funeral or not, they are no longer with us. They have graduated and moved on from this life to the next. That said, as Christians I find relief in knowing that they are where they are meant to be. I can

celebrate that their bodies have been made new, and that they now know God's love in very real, personal, healing ways. But still the tears may run down our cheeks, for it is hard to say goodbye and let them go, even if we can look forward to seeing them again. But that is just the way it is with graduations. And that is the way it is with life. And that is why Paul reminds us that even Christians grieve, but not as those who have no hope. We grieve not as those who say, "Goodby forever." We grieve as those who say, "So long for now. I will see you again soon in Heaven." For we are a people of hope. It is a hope that the world needs more than ever. It is the hope that death is not the final word, that God will make us new again. And that those of us who know Christ will be together again in Heaven.

And because of that hope we can celebrate even as we mourn. We can celebrate the lives of our saints and then say, "So long for now." So let us then thank God for his mercies, and for the opportunity to know and love these saints during the seasons of their earthly lives, and then let them go. You see, at least for the present, the season with us has passed, and so now has come to us a season in which to remember, to mourn, to celebrate, and to go on.

Yes, today is All Saints Day. It is a day to remember and give thanks for the lives of those who have died over the past year. It is a day to mourn together. We do that because that is what families do, but we do not grieve as those who have no hope. For we are first and foremost an Easter people. We believe in resurrection and the hope of Heaven, so we also celebrate the lives of those who died, even as we look forward with hope to that day when we are reunited with them in Heaven.

And I say thanks be to God for that hope. Thanks be to God for the hope of Easter resurrection.