

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER 10/5/2020

SERMON PREACHERD BY REV'D GLENN MAYTUM

This COVID-19 crisis has reminded many of us, particularly those over a certain age, of the old saying that “there are only two things certain in life”.

And, while Jesus talks about TAXES in another part of scripture, in our Gospel reading today Jesus gives us a description of HEAVEN.

Unlike here in the City, in rural areas it is still the most common thing to have a church or graveside funeral in the village, led by a local clergyperson so that, unlike many city funerals, people in the bush regularly hear read aloud the words of JOHN 14: 1-6.

These verses give strength and comfort to those who trust Jesus’ words.

Now, I think there are people who want to deny the existence of heaven. And, the truth is, we each have a choice about what we believe. And, I think it is not helpful to create images of heaven which are only the result of a vivid imagination: I, for one, am NOT comforted by the prospect of either fishing or gardening for eternity. Or, that my old pet dog will be there.

Such ideas are not grounded in Scripture. They do not come true just because they sound nice or because we want them to.

This is still the Easter Season. Easter is when Christians remember that Jesus is the One who lived, died and rose again.

So, if we trust the words of Jesus then we must acknowledge that Jesus’ words must be trustworthy. So, John 14 must be truthful and the ideas we have about heaven must be worked out looking at such truth. What we believe needs to be grounded in what Scripture, and the words of Jesus, tell us.

So, how is it that there are imaginary ideas? Because there’s not much information about heaven in the Bible!

Then, with only a small list of things to believe, shouldn’t this make it easier for us?

Well, not really.

Not having detailed information about what is ahead can be frustrating for many (just look at the way journalists and others have wanted to know detailed information about the future progress of COVID-19 and the strange questions and responses we have heard from officials and some world leaders).

Then, what are we told?

The Bible assures us of heaven’s existence. Today’s Gospel reveals to us some important things:

The image of the HOUSE in verse 2 gives us the picture of God the Father inviting us home: to His house and our house;

Secondly, in verse 2 we see there are MANY ROOMS and enough space for every person who chooses to reside there;

And, Jesus, Himself, will take us to our place and His words (in verse 3) do us great honour when He says “so that where I am you may be, also”.

Heaven is being with Jesus- the ultimate fulfilment of the relationship begun on earth.

John 14 is a great image, but it's not complete.

The Book of Revelation, also written by John and often very difficult to understand, also has various images. What we find from Revelation is there is great worship there. And, this is what we acknowledge week-by-week in our worship: that we are linked to the Saints who are worshipping God, in heaven.

Actually, I think there is a good outcome to NOT having detailed information about heaven. Because, as the Easter people we are, we have to have FAITH and HOPE. We need to believe in the CREATOR of heaven, rather than our impaired knowledge of it.

Jesus said heaven is real and Jesus' words are trustworthy.

In our first reading, St Stephen looked up and saw heaven. This gave him great strength and comfort.

In verse 5 of the Gospel, Thomas asks Jesus a question about how to get to heaven and Jesus responds with those words we all know so well:

"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is the way to our Father in heaven.

Our response is to know Jesus and the Way, the Truth and the Life: to know Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

And, as we each have a choice about what we believe, Choose wisely: respond to Jesus, the invitation God the Father has sent!