

November 1, 2009

Isaiah 25:6-9

Revelation 21:1-6

“Reflections on Heaven”

Growing up in Nebraska, I was captivated by the sky. (We had a LOT of sky). There were impressive storms, clouds, thunder, lightning. Vivid sunsets. Mighty winds. Crystal, clear, piercing blue autumn skies. Velvet black skies glittering with stars. Fluffy, cotton, puffy clouds on clear summer days. I could FEEL God’s presence whenever I paid attention to the sky. I’d lie on my back on long summer afternoons tracing a path from cloud to cloud, wondering “What will heaven be like?”

What WILL it be like? Will there be golden streets and pearly gates, like I pictured as a child? What does the Bible tell us.

Scriptural writings give us images that help us “catch the flavor” of a realm far beyond our understanding.

Let’s consider our readings for today.

Both the Old Testament vision of the prophet Isaiah and the New Testament vision of John of Patmos, the author of Revelation, paint a picture of JOY. Of God being so close at hand that he has only to reach forward to wipe all tears from our eyes.

No more pain.

No more mourning.

No more crying.

No more shame or disgrace.

NO more death.

A Feast (with fatty food- no cholesterol worries!)

Abundance (show framed embroidered sampler: Peace and Plenty).

A new beginning.

The New Testament writings of Paul include some helpful images.

(Read 1 Cor. 15:35-38, 42-44, 51-55, 57)

Paul suggests that in the next world we will assume a new FORM- just the way a tulip takes a new shape, color, texture, as it grows from the grubby,

knotty, bulb phase into a fully blooming plant. (We reflected on this last Easter.)

The writer of 1 John tells us that this new form will be like that of Christ-though it acknowledges we don't fully know or understand much about that in this life.

(Read 1 John 3:1-2)

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THIS MAKE? SO WHAT?

Today is All Saints' Day. This is the day we remember all those who loved and served Christ before us. This is the day we remember loved ones who have died.

We miss our loved ones. It's difficult to imagine where they are now. Sometimes we are afraid. Death is so cold, so hard, so final. Friends, even though God's realm, the life beyond this life, seems mysterious and impenetrable, distant and unknown, we can find peace and joy in what the Bible tells us.

It takes a leap of faith to trust in the Bible's teachings. So that's what we do each year on All Saints' Day: we remember those we love who have gone before us, and we PROCLAIM that they are now in a place of joy and feasting, a place of love and life without end. They are in a place THAT IS REAL. It is NOT IMAGINARY. It's beyond our current sight. BUT IT IS REAL AND FOREVER.

This makes a difference to us, when we must say "good-bye for now" to those we love.

BUT IT DOESN'T STOP THERE.

What are the core teachings of the Christian faith?

GOOD WILL TRIUMPH OVER EVIL.

LOVE CONQUERS ALL SIN

LIFE WINS OVER DEATH.

These are all revealed through the events of Jesus life, death, and Resurrection.

The readings we've heard today attempt to paint a picture of the heavenly realm where all these things are always true.

But WE live in THIS world. We see a lot of the opposite: evil crushing good; sin extinguishing love, death robbing people of life.

But the Bible tells us, that won't happen forever. At the END of all things, God's ways will triumph. It's like we've peeked ahead to the end of the book, and we know how it all turns out. That's what God acting in Christ did for us. He gave us the end of the story.

We have to decide to TRUST this is true. Our trust in the Resurrection and Paradise messages of Scripture changes us.

And something mysterious happens when we live as ones who trust our God of love and life: Heaven doesn't stay confined to the afterlife, but breaks into THIS life, too.

Wherever, whenever:

Good triumphs over evil-

Love conquers sin-

Life wins over death-

THAT's a flashing moment of "heaven on earth".

This happens a lot you know. More than you'd think. In very simple acts and events. A dear friend of mine, a United Methodist Pastor, now retired, lost her husband several years ago. He was in his late 50's, had worked out at his gym, and died of a massive heart attack while in the shower. This was an overwhelming shock. They had grown up in Kansas, so the service was back in their home area. Just before the funeral in a small United Methodist Church, my friend realized she was feeling woozy, weak, and like she might pass out. So, she went downstairs to the church basement, where the women of the church were preparing a luncheon to follow the service. (Just like the luncheon prepared by OUR women in THIS CHURCH's basement yesterday, to follow the celebration of the life of GamGee Dripps.) She went to one of the women and explained her problem. Immediately the woman took a large roll, broke it in half, tore off a small piece and gave it to my friend. In that moment, Christ spoke to her saying, "Here I am, right here, right now. My life is given to you, that you might have life. I am the God of

Life Eternal.” A FLASHING MOMENT OF HEAVEN ON EARTH that spoke to her of God’s promises, for herself, and for her husband.

Somehow, in those moments of heaven breaking into our here and now, we are profoundly connected with all the saints—they are with us. We cannot see them yet, but we will. We are ONE in Christ forever.

Heaven is a mystery. We cannot wrap our minds around it. But our hearts perceive it through the images of Scripture, the spirit of God in nature, and through acts of goodness, love and life.

Don’t just wait around for paradise. LIVE IT NOW! With God’s help. Amen.