

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector

Scripture: Luke 16: 19-31

"THERE'S NO WAY IN HELL"

In basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, a soldier received a package from home containing cookies. After roll call, the drill sergeant gave the trainee the choice of throwing the cookies out or eating them while he did one-arm pushups. To everyone's surprise, he chose the pushups. As a crowd watched in amazement, the soldier looked up and said through a mouthful of cookies, "This is a breeze compared to what my mother would do if she heard I threw her cookies out!"

Punishment is an extremely difficult topic to talk about, to listen to, let alone to preach about. There is no joy in the topic of Hell. It is not a joking or a laughing matter. Hell is a real, physical place. In the Bible, Jesus spoke of hell more than He spoke of heaven.

THERE IS NO REST IN HELL

The Bible shows us that there is consciousness in hell. There is awareness of surroundings and those around you. The Bible teaches that a person's life does not end at death, but continues on forever—either in heaven or in hell. Hell is a place of eternal torment reserved for the wicked and ungodly - just look at verse 24 of today's Gospel and the rich man's agony in the flames - crying out for Father Abraham to have Lazarus dip his finger in water to cool his tongue.

Jesus taught that there is a real place of eternal punishment for those who are condemned before God. In Matthew 5:22 Jesus said *"But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire."*

Matthew 5:29-30 Jesus taught us that *"If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell."*

Matthew 23:33 Jesus warns *"You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?"*

In the Gospel of Mark Jesus tells us again and again of the importance of avoiding hell - and its' damnation.

In Luke 10 - Jesus warns the cities in the Galilee that they need to repent. *"Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades."*

And in Luke 12:5 Jesus gives us further clarification saying *"But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!"*

Jesus implicitly reminds us that Satan is real, Hell is real - and it is not what today's culture has reasoned it out to be - a sort of penalty box - or corner to sit in - until you've finished your time out. No matter how any movie or book can jokingly dramatize Satan or hell, the fact remains that it is a place that no Christian wants to be - separated from **Jesus - the way, the truth and the life** - forever! Since Jesus is not present in hell - then there's no WAY in hell; there is no way to rest in hell - and there is no way out!

A very famous Christian band that comes to Kingdom Bound every year, named the Newsboys makes this case so unmistakably in their song called "Breakfast." They sing: "When the toast is burned and all the milk has turned, and Captain Crunch is waving farewell; when the big one finds you - may this song remind you - that they don't serve breakfast in hell!" My brothers

and sisters in Christ – Let's get down to brass tacks – Hell is no walk in the park, no cake walk, no wild eternal party that is just waiting to happen. You know what? It is called hell for a reason.

Non-Christians often ask this question of Christians: "**How can the God of love allow any of his creatures to suffer unending misery?**" The real question is, **how can God not? The fact that God is love makes hell necessary.** Anglican Theologian E.L. Mascall once said, "**Hell, is not compatible with God's love; it is a direct consequence of it.**" The very God who loves us is the One who respects our choices and our decisions – giving us the space to seek Him or make a total mess of things. You've heard me say this many times here at St. Bart's: "God loves us, but He does not, and never will force His love or force Himself on us." **To force love is to commit assault – plain and simple!** God allows us to decide – and to choose.

- He loves us,
- He encourages and awaits our response,
- He woos us,
- He pursues us,
- He urges us, but He does not force us,
- because He respects us.

THERE IS NO HOPE IN HELL

Hell is the terrifying reality of never ending punishment, the place of a everlasting, continuous

- "unquenchable fire." (Mark 9:43).
- Hell is the "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).
- Hell is a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42, 50). I think it would be safe to assume that there is no song in hell. Jesus wanted to impress this upon us – an indelible mark on our hearts and minds – **and so He repeated this twice:**
Matthew 13:41-42 "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth.**"
Matthew 13:49-50 "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth.**"
- Hell is a place of "outer darkness" (Matthew 22:13). There is no light! What a difference from heaven where the Lamb is the light—no need of the sun or moon.
- Hell is a place of separation from God, from our loved ones, and from the Kingdom of Heaven (Luke 16:23).
- Hell is a place of longing and remembrance: In Luke 16:25 "Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.'"
- There is a separation from the good: Luke 16:26 "between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." If we think that **sin** is just a separation from God – I do believe that this eternal chasm is far greater and wider than we can imagine. All one stranded on the other side of it could possibly be left with - is the distant memory of a time when God was present in that life – but that person willingly forced God away through unrepentant sin.

Not only is there no hope in hell – but...

PRAYER IS NOT ANSWERED IN HELL

The rich man prayed in verse 27 and following, for Lazarus to be sent to his family to warn them, but Abraham warned him that they had Moses and the Prophets- in other words they already had fair warning in the Word of God – which was the writings of Moses and the Prophets. His prayer wasn't answered – and would never be – it was too late! He pleaded for someone to come back from the dead to warn them – but was told if they won't listen to Moses and the Prophets – they won't be convinced by someone who rises from the dead. Do you hear that? That people's hearts were hardened to the Word of God? Maybe we should make that people's hearts ARE still hardened to the Word of God, and even someone rising from the dead won't open their hearts and minds. DO you see that in today's culture, not just in the first century? We are surrounded by those who make their own truth by "WordSmithing" carefully making God's truth – and even His Messiah – one who rose from the dead – into someone who matches their search for their truth. The Bible tells us that if we ignore God's Word – and ignore and don't know Jesus the Christ – then we will join the likes of the rich man in eternal seclusion.

I have heard some people rationalize that "Oh, hell won't be so bad because my friends will be there." Well that may be true for them, but hell is no party – so much so that the rich man found that he didn't want his loved ones there. The fact remains that Jesus told us that **Hell is for ALL ETERNITY!**

Now that I have given you the bad news – let's get to the Good News!

In order to find out the outcome - we need to go to the end of the Bible. Listen to these words from the Book of Revelation 20:11-15

"Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire."

You don't have to go to hell. God have made a way of escape. Our loving God has given to each one of us our personal "Fire Insurance." Not ONE Person here today will have to spend even a heartbeat in Hell – because of Jesus Christ! Jesus went to the cross to take our punishment – to pay the price for our sins – which would have been an eternity in hell – and it cost Him everything!

The One who will not force Himself on humanity is waiting for you to receive Him as Lord of your life. If you don't know Him, or have never fully accepted Him as God's Only Son – then I urge you today – to receive Jesus. Today is the day – and now is the hour that you can with all certainty be assured of never seeing hell, but instead through repentance and forgiveness of all your sins – you will spend eternity in His presence and glory. He invites you right now to ask Him into your life – to be your Savior – to be your Lord. He lovingly says: *"Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me."*(Revelation 3:20)