

Second Sunday After Pentecost, June 18, 2006, Liturgical Year “B”

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins - Curate

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

“Heaven, the Real Field of Dreams”

One of my favorite movies is “Field of Dreams” starring Kevin Costner. It is a favorite for many reasons – first because I love baseball – and used to play a lot! Second – because there is this line in the movie when Ray Kinsella, played by Costner looks at the young ghostly catcher, John Kinsella, and says “Dad, do you want to have a catch?”

Having my father go home to be with the Lord back in 1976 – the thought of seeing my Dad again and even to play catch – which we did a lot when we were both much younger – well it is pretty inexplicable – and makes me all kerflumpt. That movie does it to me every time.

With this being Father’s Day weekend – it makes me reflect about and remember so much more about the relationship between a father and his children. I want to acknowledge all of the fathers and the children of fathers here today – hey that would be all of us – wouldn’t it? Ultimately – we are the children of our Heavenly Father – and for that we give thanks and praise.

Let me get back to the movie – because the premise of “Field of Dreams” is that Ray is inspired to build a baseball field, lights and all, in his cornfield. He is then visited by a group of baseball greats who come because he has built it. The spirit of Shoeless Joe Jackson asks Ray – “Is this Heaven?” Ray simply answers, “No this is Iowa!”

Our ultimate hope in this life is to be with Jesus in the next, in the kingdom of heaven, but first we need to spend time in our Iowa – or in our case Western New York.

Well, just what is Heaven Like?

John Newton, the famous author of “Amazing Grace” once wrote: “When I get to heaven, I shall see three wonders there: The first wonder will be to see many people there whom I did not expect to see; The second wonder will be to miss many people whom I did expect to see; the third and greatest of all will be to find myself there”

Interestingly enough, in 1991 a Gallup poll showed that 78 percent of Americans expect to go to heaven when they die. However, many of them hardly ever pray, read the Bible, or attend church. They admit that they live to please themselves instead of God. I wonder why these people would want to go to heaven.

Well, let me ask you, do you expect to find yourself in heaven? And secondly, what do you expect to find when you get there?

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 *“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling-- if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord-- for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please*

him. For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.”

I believe that there are six Scripturally based examples of what life will be like in the real “Field of Dreams” in the presence of Almighty God – examples of what we can expect in heaven.

1. An Embodied Life

What we see in these few verses of today’s Epistle from Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians is that life in heaven is an embodied life. People who go to heaven don’t become ghosts or extraterrestrial spirit beings – or angel like.

There will also be some continuity between our present bodies and those we will have in heaven. Romans 8:11 says, “*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.*” The physical deterioration of our bodies reminds us of just how brief this life really is. St. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15 that our bodies are mortal and doomed to die, heading for corruption and decay (whether we like it or not) – but that the body that is to come will be full of life, a life that nothing can harm or destroy.

In Job 19:26 “*After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God*” we hear the promise that we will have a new body when we see God face to face in His heavenly kingdom.

I believe that heaven is not the just place we go when we die, but rather the place where God has our future bodies already in store for us. Paul refers to the body as a ‘house’ or a ‘tent’ – and makes the suggestion that our present bodies can be exchanged for better ones, and that being embodied matters! **The Christian hope for the future is not about being disembodied, but being re-embodied.** We will be re-embodied in forms that will not be produced by humans, but made by Almighty God – bearing some similarity to our present bodies, but will quite different in other respects.

2. A Social Life.

Life in heaven is shown in Holy Scripture to be in relationship with others. We will recognize one another and be in a holy community with one another.

Heb 13:14 tells us of **the perfect city** - What would a perfect city look like?

- There will be no crime.
- No homelessness.
- No unemployment.
- No pollution.
- No corruption in the council/government.
- No death – no pain.
- **Revelation 21:4-5** “*Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.*” *And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”*”

A victorious kingdom (Heb 12:28 “*a kingdom that can’t be shaken*”), What will that be like? There will be no civil unrest - only peace. No terrorism. No war. In fact when a kingdom is victorious that means that the battle is over and there is no more war of any kind – for the enemy will have been

defeated and there will be no more evil. Evil – which is the absence of good – does not come from God, but from the enemy, and since he will have been defeated – we will only have good in the presence of God – our consuming fire.

A Holy temple (Ezekiel 40-48), How will that look? No unrighteousness. No favoritism, no racial prejudice. No unfaithfulness. Fairness and truth will be the norm. Goodness will be second nature. Morality will reign. Everyone there will be upright and honest. All of the traits of our fallen humanity will be no more – except the good, and we will worship the Lord in His presence, in His Holy Eternal Temple.

A wedding feast: The image of the feast from Revelation 19:7; It will be a time of intimate sharing with close friends and family. It will be a celebration; a real party. A time of celebrating the coming together of a bride and her groom. There will be a festival atmosphere that will exceed all of our earthly expectations – and what absolutely blows me away is that **we are the invited guests**.

3. **A Responsible Life**

There will be activities in heaven designed to employ your highest capabilities. We have the example of Luke 19:12-27 and the Parable of the Ten Pounds. The point to this parable is that the reward for faithful work done here on earth, is greater responsibility in heaven.

- Perhaps new songs are to be written and sung (Revelation 5:9)
- There'll be times of learning (Revelation 14:3)
- There'll be times of service (Revelation 22:3)
- There'll be a place alongside Christ for believers to judge the world and the angels righteously, with justice and in fairness (1 Corinthians 6:2)

I do believe that we will not just go to heaven as a place to just dwell and be with the saints – which we will do - but we will all have a role that God gives us to do – in serving and praising Him.

4. **A perfect life**

Everyone who lives in heaven possesses a perfect knowledge. Paul gives us a vision of this in his words from 1 Corinthians 13:12 *"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."*

Also, no one in heaven is a failure. In heaven, everyone is morally perfect. We read in Hebrews 12:22-23 that the only people who dwell in heaven are the righteous who have been made perfect.

5. **An endless life**

Jesus Himself has given us the proof in His words from John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"*

Eternal life is a successful life and a fruitful life. Jesus died so that we might share eternity with Him and all that goes with it. It is a place of joy and peace, of not needing anything. In John 10:10 Jesus says, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*

6. **A God centered life**

I just picture the vast sea of white robes praising God. These words from **Revelation 7:14-17** immediately come to my mind: *"They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple;*

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and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” The Lamb at the center of the Throne! Can you think of anything more wonderful?

Or these words from **Revelation 21:3** “*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."*”

The thought of sitting in His presence for eternity is more than words can describe. The words of **Psalm 16:11** – 17 do a really good job: “*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*”

Noted theologian and author, James I Packer, who wrote the famous book Knowing God had this to say about heaven in his 1986 book Your Father Loves You. “We cannot visualize heaven's life and the wise man will not try to do so. Instead he will dwell on the doctrine of heaven, where the redeemed will find all their heart's desire: joy with their Lord, joy with his people, and joy in the ending of all frustration and distress and in the supply of all wants. What was said to the child -- "If you want sweets and hamsters in heaven, they'll be there" -- was not an evasion but a witness to the truth that in heaven no felt needs or longings go unsatisfied. What our wants will actually be, however, we hardly know, except the first and foremost: we shall want to be "always...with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

What shall we do in heaven? Not lounge around but worship, work, think, and communicate, enjoying activity, beauty, people, and God. First and foremost, however, we shall see and love Jesus, our Savior, Master, and Friend.”

I might not know a lot about the high end of the world of finance, but one term I hear a lot of is ‘futures.’ Futures are commodities (like oil, wheat, wool, and even the world famous pork bellies), that are bought at an agreed price today for delivery at a future. **An embodied life, a social life, a responsible life, a perfect life, an endless life, and a life lived in the presence of God**, now these are some the commodities of a heavenly existence.

Thanks be to God, Jesus Christ has paid the price in order for you to one day take delivery of a life in heaven. Imagine standing before the Lord when you get there, and you ask Him: “Is this Tonawanda?” Jesus simply answers – “No, This is heaven!”