

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, September 25, 2016, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 16:19-31

***“There's No Way in Hell”***

This life is definitely fleeting. I stepped out of the shower this morning and my wife, Marilyn, asked me if I knew of a man named Jose Fernandez, and I said sure. He is a star pitcher for the Miami Marlins. He was supposed to pitch today, but they moved him back a day and he will pitch against the Mets tomorrow. She said that he was killed this morning. How fleeting this life is; he and two other people that they know of were in a boat that crashed into the rocks of Miami. The call came in about 3 AM this morning. A lot of things race through your mind: what was he doing out at 3 AM in the morning? What was going on? But the biggest one that flashed through my mind was “oh, Lord Jesus, I just hope that he knew you – and put you first in his life.” He often like many ballplayers would point to the sky when things happened. You would wonder – is he pointing to the sky to give the glory to Jesus or is he saying I am number one. I don't know. It is too late for him now – but we pray for his family. Life is fleeting!

In basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia, a soldier received a gift 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, and I have got to tell you - to preach about. There is no joy in the subject of Hell. Hell is not on the Top Ten List of favorite topics for most people! It is not a joking or a laughing matter. Hell is a real, physical place, and anyone who refuses God's love will end up there. In the Bible, Jesus spoke more about hell than He spoke of heaven.

The Bible shows us that there is consciousness in hell. There is awareness of surroundings and those around you. The Bible teaches that a persons' life does not end at death, but continues on forever—either in heaven (in the glory of God) or in hell (separated from Him forever.) 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 (page 1506 of Pew Bible) Jesus said *“But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.”* “Raca” is a term that was used to show disapproval – meaning empty headed! It was not a compliment – in any way, shape or form.

Matthew 5:29-30 (page 1506 of Pew Bible) Jesus taught us that *“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than*

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, September 25, 2016, Year C

*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 part of your body 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. This is not fun to talk about – it is not fun to listen to – but we need to be aware of it.

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.*" He is talking about His adopted hometown.

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 ever 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 of hell!

There is a very famous Christian band, 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!" So my friends - 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 to make a total mess of things. You've heard me say this many times here at St. Andrew's: "God loves us, but He does not and never will force His love or force Himself upon us or anyone." **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 pursues us, He urges us, but He does not force us, because He respects us.

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

- "*Unquenchable fire.*" (Mark 9:43).

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, September 25, 2016, Year C

- 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 (page 1522 of Pew Bible) “*The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*”  
Matthew 13:49-50 (page 1523 of Pew Bible) “*This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, 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 of God 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). See how Jesus kept warning about hell?
- Hell is a place of longing and remembrance: In Luke 16:25 (Page 1628 of Pew Bible) “*But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.*”
- There is a separation from the good: Luke 16:26 (same page of Pew Bible) “*between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over 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! You have already refused God and so He doesn't listen to the prayers in agony. I am sorry if this is frightening, but this is something that we all need to hear, that we all need to be aware of. If there are things in our lives that we need to let go of; if there are things in our lives – or people that we have not forgiven – remember the words of Jesus in the Lord's Prayer – “*forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*” If we want God's forgiveness – we have to GIVE God's forgiveness! Search your soul – let go of this; take that weight off your shoulders; Jesus wants it – give it to Him!

In this Gospel message, the rich man prayed beginning with verse 27 for Lazarus to be sent to his family to warn them, but Abraham warned him that they had Moses and the Prophets. How much more today, when people have more than Moses and the Prophets – we have Jesus to listen to – or deny. In other words they already had been given fair warning in the Word of God – the writings of Moses and the Prophets. So this man's prayer wasn't answered – and never would be – it was too late! He pleaded for someone to come back from the dead to warn them – but he was told if they won't listen to Moses and the Prophets – they won't be convinced by

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, September 25, 2016, Year C

someone who rises from the dead. Did you hear that? Do you know someone who rose from the dead – and is being rejected and denied day after day, hour after hour? 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 carefully crafting God's truth and even His Messiah, making a different Jesus than the One we know. They are turning Him into someone who **matches their search for their truth**. We live in a "pluralistic" society - you have your truth and I'll have my truth – why can't we all just get along! The Bible tells us that if we ignore God's Word – and ignore and don't know God's Messiah, Jesus the Messiah, 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 on page 1936 of the Pew Bible:

*"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 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 has made a way of escape. Our loving God has given to each one of us **our own personal "Fire Insurance."** Not ONE Person here today will have to spend even a heartbeat in Hell – because of one thing; one person; 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 mankind 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. I urge you that if you have family or friends that do not know Christ – tell them about Him, introduce them to Him. 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 the presence, the love and the light of Almighty God. He invites you right now to ask Him into your life – to be your Savior – to be your Lord. Jesus lovingly says, as was recorded by John: *"Here I am! I stand at the door and*

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, September 25, 2016, Year C

*knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*”(Revelation 3:20) My brothers and sisters – there is a Way to heaven, His name is Jesus – and there is no way in hell!