

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, September 25, 2022, Year C

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 16:19-31

"His Guarantee"

One of my least favorite topics is punishment. I mean who likes to be punished and who likes to do the punishing? Sometimes as parents, we have to. Thank goodness our days are over – for our kids are grown, so that is the end of that chapter, but there are some here that are just beginning a brand-new chapter. And then there is the topic that takes place in today's Gospel - Hell. Hell is not on the Top Ten List of favorite topics for most people! It is not a joking or a laughing matter. Some people speak about Hell lightly, but according to Jesus and Holy Scriptures, it is a real, physical place. The sad news is that anyone who refuses God's love will end up there. Anyone who refuses God's invitation of eternal salvation will end up there as well. In the Bible, Jesus spoke more about hell than He spoke of heaven.

The Bible shows us that people will have an awareness in Hell. Awareness of surroundings and those around you. The Bible teaches that a person's life does not end at death. Life continues forever – either in heaven in the glory of God, or in hell - separated from Him for all eternity – and that means forever. Hell is a place of eternal torment that is reserved for the wicked and ungodly. You might say – ungodly? Ungodly is someone who has refused God's invitation. An example is in verse 24 of today's Gospel. The rich man is in agony in the flames, and is crying out for Father Abraham to have Lazarus dip his finger in the water to cool his tongue. Really, if you think about it – it is absolutely absurd.

Jesus said that there is a real place of eternal punishment for those who are condemned before God. In the Gospels, Jesus gave a great many clear examples of this place of suffering and damnation in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus also implicitly maintains that Satan is real, and that Hell is real as well. It is not a place for a "time out" that you go there and think that when you have suffered enough – God is going to take you out and send you to heaven. It doesn't work that way! It is either, you are in heaven or you are not. It is not a penalty box. The fact remains that Hell is a place that no Christian ever wants to be in. If you are a Christian it is because you love Jesus. If you go to Hell, you will always be separated from Jesus forever. You will not even see Him. There will be darkness and you will be separated - forever! Remember, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. There is no way to get out of Hell. The punishment is permanent and it is not forgivable. There is no parole!

Non-Christians often ask Christians: "How can a loving God 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. God, who loves us, also respects our choices and our decisions –remember, God gave mankind something called 'free will?' The penalties of free will mean that you are accountable for your decisions. He gives us the space to seek Him or to make a total mess of things. You've heard me say this many times right 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." God allows us to decide – and to choose.

Hell is the terrifying reality of never-ending punishment. It is a place of “*Unquenchable fire.*” (Mark 9:43). Hell is the “*eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Matthew 25:1). Hell is a place of “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 13:42, 50). Hell is a place of eternal darkness. What a difference from heaven where the Lamb of God is the light—and there is no need of the sun or moon. I am sorry if this makes you uncomfortable in some way – but it has to be addressed, it has to be spoken about. If you are sitting on the edge, or on the fence and haven’t yet made your decision – now is the time!

In Luke 16:25 of today’s Holy Gospel, Jesus explained, “*But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.*” Jesus explains the permanent separation from God, and from all that is good, “*And besides all this, between us and you, a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may 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 anyone stranded on the other side of it could possibly be left with, is the distant memory of a time when God was present in their life, but remember that person willingly forced God away through unrepentant sin.

Not only is there no hope in hell – but prayer is not answered in hell! A person in hell has already refused God and so God doesn’t listen to their prayers in agony. I am sorry if this is terrifying, but this is something that everyone needs to hear, and to be aware of. If there are things in our lives that we need to let go of, or if there are things in our lives, or people that we have not forgiven, please 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, then we have to give forgiveness!

In today’s Gospel reading, the rich man prayed for Lazarus to be sent to his family to warn them, but Father Abraham warned him that they had Moses and the Prophets. We have much more than Moses and the Prophets, for we have Jesus to listen to – or to deny. So, this man’s prayer in this parable wasn’t answered, and never would be, for 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, then they won’t be convinced by someone who rises from the dead. People’s hearts were hardened to the Word of God. Let us stop here for a second – someone already HAS risen from the dead, and there are people that are not listening to Him. He has warned and He has promised. He has given a guarantee, which we will speak about a little later.

Today, Jesus has spoken and people’s hearts are still hardened to the Word of God, and even someone who rose from the dead won’t open their hearts and minds – and that person is Jesus Himself! 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 sadly and

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mistakenly doing their own thing. We live in a “pluralistic” society, where you can have your truth and then I can have my truth and we can all just not bump into one another. You can be happy, and I can be happy, I am sorry – but that makes me sick! The Bible tells us that if we ignore God’s Word and ignore and refuse God’s Messiah, Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Christ is the one that we need to listen to, and if we ignore Him then we will sadly join the likes of that rich man in eternal seclusion.

I have heard some people try to rationalize that by saying things like, “Oh, hell won’t be so bad because all my friends will be there. Ha, Ha, Ha.” Well that may be true for them, but my friends, the truth is that hell is no party, so much so that the rich man found out that he didn’t want his loved ones being there as well. The fact remains that Jesus told us that Hell is for all eternity. Don’t worry – I am almost done with the warnings – and I am about to share with you the ‘good news!’

I want you to listen to these words from the Book of Revelation 20:11-15, “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.”

The good news is that you don’t have to go to hell! God has made a way for you to escape that altogether. He has given to each one of us our own personal “Fire Insurance.” No one here today will have to spend even a heartbeat in Hell, because of one thing; Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ went to the cross to take our punishment, paying the price for our sins, which would have cost an eternity in hell, and it cost Him everything! His life.

Jesus is waiting for you to receive Him as Lord of your life. If you don’t know Him, and there is a number here in church this morning, but there is a great many people who are watching on Facebook or YouTube, and if you don’t know Jesus Christ, or have never fully accepted Him as God’s Only Son, then I urge you today, to receive Jesus. If you have family or friends that do not know Jesus Christ, please tell them about Him, and introduce them to Him. Don’t waste any time, and you can with all certainty be assured of never seeing hell. Through repentance and forgiveness of all of 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. As your Savior, and your Lord.

Wednesday Night during our Bible Study, a question came. The question was ‘how can we be sure that we are not going to receive punishment, and that our sins are forgiven?’ The answer is very simple – all you have to do is ask! Ask the Lord to forgive your sins. Tell Him you are

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sorry. You do not have to do any happy dance or go through hoops, or have to do all sorts of 'works' to try to earn your way to heaven – you simply have to ask. Could it possibly be that simple? The answer to that is -YES. Think about John 3:16 and following. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* Plug your name in the place of 'world' There it is! That is the guarantee, the agreement.

But there is more. In closing I want to share with you Jesus' loving words, recorded by the Apostle John from Revelation 3:20. One of my very favorite blessings in the Bible. Jesus says, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”* This is His guarantee. There is a Way to heaven, His name is Jesus, and He wants to spend eternity with you!