

The Last Sunday of the Church year

Text: Luke 23:43

Today you will be with me in Paradise

Theme: The Promise of Paradise

Where is the most beautiful place in the world where you have ever been? Think of a place that just took your breath away. It might have been a natural wonder. I will never forget the beauty of the Canadian Rockies when I went there more than 20 years ago. It might be a beautiful place that we have built. After the renovations to Trinity, downtown it was beautiful, just before it burned a couple of years ago. There are many beautiful places in this world, which are both natural and man-made.

The Hebrew and Greek words for Paradise in the Bible actually mean “Garden.” That’s why the Garden of Eden is called Paradise. In 1 Corinthians 12:4 Paul’s spirit entered paradise, and in Revelation 2:7 Jesus promises the paradise of God to those who come. That paradise is promised in the final two chapters of the book. On this last Sunday of the church year when we look forward to our Lord’s return, I would like to look at Christ’s promise of paradise.

I. To get a picture of what paradise will be like, it is good to look at what life was like in the Garden of Eden.

Everything was beautiful. It says that the trees and plants were pleasing to the eye and good for food. Adam and Eve had work to do, but it was not toil. They enjoyed their work. They also got along. There were no arguments or fights. Every day was like being in the most beautiful place in the world with the people that you love the most. God created this world without any sadness, pain or grief. There was nothing but happiness and joy. It went even a step further, God planned that we would live forever in the paradise that he created for us.

Even in its fallen state, we still get a glimpse of the goodness that there is in God’s creation. Marriage and the birth of our children are very happy events. There are parts of our work that we enjoy very much. There are still parts of creation that take our breath away, gardens that are beautiful, and buildings that are architectural wonders. There is still a lot of goodness left in this world.

II. But it has been corrupted with sin.

We see how sin destroyed the goodness in this world right after Adam and Eve fell into temptation. They each tried to blame someone else for what they had done. Adam blamed God because God gave him the woman. The woman said, “The devil made me do it.” Their perfect relationship with God, each other, and all creation had been destroyed. Soon they would experience grief when one of their sons killed the other. Within a number of generations things were so bad that every thought of almost everyone’s heart was evil all of the time, so God decided to send the flood.

That corruption still continues today. How many of your families experience perfect harmony? How many of you travel to and from work singing, “Hi Ho,” like the seven dwarves. We have quarrels

in our families and hardships at work. There are things in nature that we don't like at all, like mosquitos in the summer or snow in early November. Our homes might be beautiful when they are new, but soon there seems to be one thing after the next that needs repair. The beautiful ash grove that our members planted in 1969 will cost us \$11,000 to cut down in the coming months because all of the trees have died. Some of the greatest wonders of the world, such as the Babylonian Gardens or the temple at Jerusalem can only be described because they have been destroyed. We have griefs and worries. Since the fall into sin, our bodies begin to wear out. We have aches and pains. We forget things. We sometimes have troubling learning something new. Eventually our bodies will be laid into the ground, and they will become dust.

The best example of that corruption was on the cross of Calvary. Three men were hanging on crosses in utter agony. Two of them were hanging there because of horrible things that they had done to other people, but even worse one of them was completely innocent. But it is only through Jesus innocent suffering and death for us, that we can receive Paradise. He paid for our sins on the cross, and He pleads for our forgiveness, just as He prayed that His Father would forgive those who were crucifying Him. Like the repentant thief, none of us deserve Paradise. Yet, through faith in Jesus, He promises us Paradise. He forgives our sins. He will give us His grace and mercy throughout our lives on this earth. When we leave this life He will receive our souls into the joys of heaven...

III. When Christ returns, Paradise will be restored.

It's interesting how many parallels there are between the New Jerusalem that John describes in Revelation 22, which Jesus will bring, and the garden of Eden in Genesis 2. There is nothing impure. Everything is good. There is a river flowing through the city, which is the water of life. There are many beautiful trees, including the tree of life. One big difference is that there will no longer be any need for the sun or moon because God's glory will give us light. When Christ comes with His new garden there will be a loud voice, which says, *"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. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* Paradise will be restored.

That is a sure promise that Christ gives to all who trust in Him. He promises us paradise. It will be the most magnificent place that we will ever be. Our joy will never end. Our lives will never end. We will live and reign with Christ for all of eternity. This promise is not something that we have earned. It is God's free gift to each one of us because Christ took the penalty of our sin on Himself on that cross and opened paradise to each one of us.

A short time after the thief on the cross asked Jesus to remember him, he died, but Jesus remembered him, and took his soul into His glory. Since the fall into sin, our Lord has remembered millions of His people from Abel up to Christians who have died today. What a thrilling sight that will be when Christ returns with those whom He has gathered. That day all of His people will be raised from the dead and gathered, and He will give us paradise for all of eternity. This is not just a wish or a false hope. It is sure. Christ has given us the promise of paradise, just as He gave it to that repentant thief. The blood that He shed on that cross and His glorious resurrection, assures us that our sins are atoned for and that we too shall rise.

May God grant each one of us that sure confidence in Christ's promise of paradise to us.

Amen.

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Milwaukee, WI
November 24, 2019*

Prayer of the Church
Last Sunday in the Church Year
November 24, 2019

P: Father in Heaven, You have appointed the day when Your Son, Jesus Christ, shall return in all His majesty and glory to judge both the living and the dead. For another year of grace, waiting for that glorious day, receive our thanks and praise. We lift up our eyes in anticipation and pray,
C: **Come Lord Jesus..**

P: We thank You, gracious God, for the faith You have given to us. May this precious gift sustain us now and in all times of trial, temptation, and testing, knowing that paradise awaits those who wait with joy for the reappearing of Him who ascended on high. We lift up our eyes in anticipation and pray,

C: **Come Lord Jesus.**

P: Jesus Christ, who has ascended, will come again in clouds to receive glory and honor from all creation. As that special day of days approaches, we pray that you will give us the zeal to be faithful witnesses of the message of salvation and to generously support the ministry of your church. Help us always to remember that the day is surely drawing near when all work in Your name shall cease. Until then, fill us with dedication to share the good news of sins forgiven and the promise of paradise. We lift up our eyes in anticipation and pray,

C: **Come Lord Jesus.**

P: Lord of the Harvest, look with favor on all who are in need. Fill the hungry with good things. Give the poor and unemployed gainful employment. Heal the sick (especially _____), comfort those who mourn (especially _____), and watch over all who travel. Be near the dying, give courage to those who suffer oppression and want, defend all orphans and widows, and protect the weak, the unborn, and the aged. We lift up our eyes in anticipation and pray,

C: **Come Lord Jesus.**

P: Dear Father, this is the day You have made. Keep us grateful for all that you provide to us on this earth for the the paradise that you will bring on that great day when Your Son returns. We offer You our prayers and intercessions in the name of Him who is and who will surely come again, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: **Amen.**