

Special two page edition!

Monday

Read Psalm 88

Psalm 88 seems to intermix thoughts of a gloomy afterlife with thoughts of a gloomy present life. Read over it again quickly and when the Psalmist mentions “Sheol” or “the Pit” consider whether the reference could be to the present life, life after death, or both.

We contemporary Christians would do well to hold in mind the that hellish suffering is not confined to the afterlife or only confined to this life. We would do well to believe people when they tell us they are suffering – not only physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual pain – but when they are suffering from the systems and conventions of our society and world. And we will do better when we walk beside them in their suffering and advocate for change that will make our world better. We shouldn’t let the promises of Paradise make us callous to the hellishness of the present.

Conversely, the suffering of the present is not the final answer. We can work to make the world a better place and still point to the fact that the world will one day be put to rights when Jesus returns in glory (more on that in a future sermon) and that we can take solace and hope in the future that awaits us both after we die and when Jesus returns.

Let each of us be beacons of hope for today and point to the bright future of tomorrow.

Tuesday

Read Luke 23:26-43

What is the purpose of Jesus descending to Sheol/Hades/Hell? Our first three reasons from the sermon, in sum:

1. To confirm that Jesus really died. Jesus is resurrected from a real death, not a simulated one, and thus goes to the place where the dead go. The first 500 years of Christian history included a lot of debate about whether Jesus really died and so we affirm in the Creed that Jesus died the death that humans die.

2. Jesus unlocks Paradise. Jesus tells the penitent thief hanging on the cross next to him in Luke 23:43, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” The presence of Jesus in Sheol/Hades opens up the gates of heaven for all those trusting in Jesus and brings the opportunity to live forever with Jesus in heaven and then on the renewed and recreated earth.

3. Jesus perfects the spirits of what we would think of as believers from the Old Testament period and brings them out of the gloom of the Pit and into the same Paradise experience (see Hebrews 12).

This is important work, indeed! Spend some time in prayer with thanksgiving for the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Wednesday

Read 1 Peter 3:18-22

This is one of the trickiest and most debated sections in all of the Bible. The point being made is that Jesus proclaims his victory over death, sin, and destruction to the corners of cosmos and invites us into his victory. As the first line of an old, old hymn by the same name says, “Christ leads me through no darker rooms than he went through before.” We live in solidarity with Jesus.

Is there a challenging place you need to go today or that you can see coming up in the future? Jesus is with you and you are with Jesus. Be in prayer and go in confidence that nothing can force you from Jesus.

Thursday

Read Romans 14:9 and 1 Corinthians 15:22

What does Jesus’ descent to hell mean for us? In sum:

1. The descent of Jesus opens up an eternity spent with Jesus and all the faithful for those who call on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and live a life following him as his disciple. Amen!

2. Jesus’ descent is proof that Jesus really died and is truly victorious over death in his resurrection from the dead and ascension to the right hand of God the Father. My old

professor James Kay writes, “If death were an impenetrable barrier for God’s redeeming grace, then death would be God. Death would have the final word, and death would have the final victory over life. Christ’s descent into hell, as descent to the dead, disputes this claim of death to absolute lordship.” Jesus is victorious over the finality of death. And so we stand before the mind-boggling mystery that God the Father and God the Son, Jesus Christ, joined by the Holy Spirit of love and freedom, take into the very dynamics of their being and relationship the ravages of sin in order to destroy its dominion over us.

3. When we die with Christ, death has lost its sting. When the Puritan John Preston lay dying, someone asked him if he feared death, especially now that it was so close. “No,” he said, “I shall change my place, but I shall not change my company.” He knew he was leaving his friends but not his ultimate friend and companion, Jesus Christ.

4. Our lives – in the here and now – are subject to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And as Christ has declared his victory to the whole cosmos, we see definitively that every human project – individually or collectively – that is apart from Christ and the will of God will fail, is doomed, and is indeed, damned. Hell and all evil is defeated and doomed to failure and ultimate destruction. Of course, we should not partner with evil and sin, though we are so prone to giving in to its charms. This also means we should not deny hell, ignore evil, or cover up the ravages

of hell on earth with large blue cloths – literal or metaphorical. Nor should we gloss over it by eliminating its seeming unpleasantness from the Apostles’ Creed.

Let us confront evil under the Lordship of Jesus and be sure of the future.

Friday

Please read and reflect upon John 20:1-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-18 in preparation for Sunday worship.



Guernica by Pablo Picasso