

Where on Earth is Heaven?

All Saints Day 2021

Where on earth is heaven? I asked myself this not long ago because I wondered where on earth *is* heaven? We know heaven is where all good Christian saints go when life here is over, but is there, or can there be a heaven on earth and in that case, where on earth is heaven?

Its a strange mix of human questions isn't it, because we ask, 'where on earth is this or that?' when we can't find something, 'for heaven's sake' when we are perplexed, but rarely do we think of where heaven might be on earth

We have some idea of what heaven is when we all die, the Psalmist agrees with Isaiah who makes it plain heaven is up a mountain, where the Lord of Hosts will provide food and wine and where he will swallow up death forever. He will destroy the shroud of sin from all peoples, and he will wipe the tears from our eyes.

In Revelation, John says it is another world, for the old earth and old heaven have passed away, so who really knows where he was shown in his vision, but we do know, that yet again, God will wipe the tears from our eyes and there will be no more mourning and no more sorrow. God is going to dwell with us, and we will be his forever. One thing all the readings relate to is that heaven is place where there is no sadness, no weeping and no tears, and it is with God in its midst.

Can you imagine – no sadness and no tears! Very different from our experience of this world, and yet God promises this for his saints; he will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from the earth.

When Mary meets with Jesus in today's gospel, she is weeping. Her brother Lazarus has died, and although she sent for Jesus to come while he was still living, Jesus dallied too long. When Jesus finally appears and Jesus sees Mary weeping, he is greatly disturbed in his spirit. The Jews at the scene were weeping, and then Jesus himself weeps. What a great comfort it is for us Christians to realise that Jesus is fully human as well as fully God. He understood the grief and troubles of those assembled, and he understands all our griefs and troubles today. He weeps with us. He comforts us.

He loves us so much that he wants us to identify with him. There was no need for Jesus to feel sad for Lazarus, he knew he would see him again in resurrected life; no, he cried to be alongside Mary and the others gathered there. This is what he called us to do in the beatitudes – to mourn with those who mourn, to be happy with those that rejoice, to just BE with others and partake in their life experiences. But was Jesus also giving us a glimpse of heaven on earth? Joy from mourning?

It is a hard thing to believe that God can raise from the dead. We know in our hearts that he raised Jesus from

death to life, but somehow that is a little different to us than raising a 4-day dead human. But however hard we find this in today's world (any world!), Jesus called out to a dead body bringing it to life, bringing Lazarus back to his family and to his friend Jesus. As the ever-practical Martha points out – there is already a stench of rotting flesh, but Jesus asks her to believe – because belief brings Christians into the glory of God.

We were once rotting flesh, bound in spiritual bandages, bonds, that kept us away from living a life of truth and love in Christ, and just as Jesus says, 'unbind him and let him go' about Lazarus, he says to us 'let go of the world, the little stresses and bandages you wind yourselves up in and live freely and abundantly'.

The raising of Lazarus was temporary as he had to die again as a mortal, but the resurrection of Jesus was to come – the first rising of the Kingdom of God coming on earth as it is in heaven. The truth is, that since then, there have been billions of risings. "How?" you might say, "I've never seen one". But, according to Scripture, the moment you put your faith in Jesus (which is putting your faith in the fact that He actually did rise from the dead), you experience a rising all of your own. That faith changes us - our faith in Jesus results in changes to life and if we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, if we, too, have gone from death to life spiritually, this life-altering good news brings heaven to earth – and finding ways of sharing that is our mission.

It never fails to amaze me how much God loves us. Not just corporately as humans, but how interested he is in our individual life experiences. How much he loves me, you, is incomprehensible, but that he sent Jesus to overcome death just for you, me, and to forgive our sins – the entire substitutionary work of Jesus was for you – only you and if you were the only person on earth he would still have done it.

Where on earth is heaven? Are we saints? Yes we are saints, even before we die a mortal death; all who confess Jesus as Lord are saints, and heaven is in our grasp whether you think it is at the top of a mountain, in the sky, or a place like John saw. We have the power in Christ as saints to bring heaven to wherever we are! We can bring light and life wherever we go, we can bring comfort to those who weep, we can help the helpless, we can bring a little bit of joy.

People of St Mary's, don't underestimate your Christian love and power in the Holy Spirit. Be a saint to yourself, your family and those around you. Where on earth is heaven? It is within our hearts, it is a work to do, it is a power to harness, until we meet with those other saints gone before us and we can all stop weeping and rejoice around the glorious throne of the Lamb – which is exactly where heaven is, now and always, is His presence!