

PARADISE AND A CELEBRATION OF THE RESURRECTION

Sermon Preached in The Mackey Worship Center

Westminster Presbyterian Church

353 East Pine Street, Wooster, Ohio, 44691

The Rev. Dr. Carroll C. Meyer, Preaching

February 4, 2007

Communion Sunday

Psalm 148

Revelation 21

The Hymn of Praise: 453

The Hymn of Meditation: 376

The Hymn of Commitment: 309

There was a time past when each one of us did not know that we were not yet called into being. We did not have a consciousness of ourselves before we came into existence. There may be a time when we no longer have an awareness that we once were. As the poet once wrote, *Our little systems have their day, they have their day and cease to be.* Or, maybe, as Pascal suggested, there is a 50% chance that there is a more.

I am quite amazed that we can be living in such a time as ours, when our minds are conjuring up such fantasies in life that we see in the theaters every day and our real science is leading us into dimensions externally and internally at levels magnified greater than our imaginations can possibly extend, and yet, we do not have the faith or the willingness or the courage or perhaps the spiritual insight that there may actually be another life still ahead for us. I am not asking that we even believe it. But that we might have the courage to even imagine another life beyond this very earthly one.

Did you know that for the first eight hundred years of Christianity, the observance of communion had no concept of the cross, of the suffering death of Jesus? The Last Supper or the sharing of the Eucharist was neither about sacrifice nor martyrdom. The Last Supper was celebrated as a foretaste of or a reenactment of paradise, of the bountiful life presented in Revelations. Communion services were celebrated with great gifts of food being brought to the service, the congregation eating their fill and the great harvest was then shared with the poor in the community. Communion was a celebration of expectation and anticipation of a new life to come. As our current liturgy reads, 'Being baptized with Christ we are also raised with

Christ.' The Apostles' Creed, recited during worship for century upon century since the fourth century is almost devoid of reference to life on this earth and deals almost exclusively with life after death. (Recite)

Those of us in the mainline churches have become almost totally absorbed in the culture and the necessary missions and ethics of our time. The major confession of our church, The Confession of 1967, is based on the theme of reconciliation. But the focus is not on Christ's work of reconciliation between us and God but on the human work in society of reconciliation between and among peoples. I am in complete agreement with that confession demanding great social ethics and mission and have spent most of my ministry in the inner city serving under its guidance. However, it does not portray the whole picture of the Christian life.

Oddly enough, in a time in which we are engaged in an explosion of possibilities in science and technologies, a time when reality has out run our capacity to imagine it and even our fantasy lags behind experience, we Christians are hesitant, even in that cultural environment of unlimited possibilities, we are hesitant to posit the hope of an eternal, bodily life of self awareness in relation to God. We need to regain the stories and the language and the liturgy and the courage for celebrating the new heaven and the new earth.

That is why today we are worshiping in what might be called a ritualistic manner. Our hymns, liturgy, sacred dance and communion go back in some form at least 1600 years. I want to at least maintain a glimmer of that part of our identity as a people of the resurrection and the hope of paradise. I will close with what is emphasized in the fourth century poem put to the Divinum Mysterium music: note if you will, that the poem does not speak of living in the present. It only refers to a time before creation and a time when this creation will cease, a time with the infinite and eternal God.

Of the Father's love begotten, before the world began to be,
He is alpha and omega, the beginning and the end,
He the source and ending he.

Amen