**“We’ll Be Like Angels, Not Zombies”**

**Rev. Bill Freeman**

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**Menifee United Church of Christ**

A florist and a lawyer die in separate car accidents and go to heaven. St. Peter meets them at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter says, “Let me take you to your heavenly homes.” They go a little ways and they come upon a magnificent mansion. St. Peter says to the lawyer, “Here’s where you’ll spend all of eternity.” Then the florist and St. Peter go a little farther and they come upon this raggedy old shack. St. Peter says to the florist, “Here’s where you’ll spend all of eternity.” The florist says, “Wait a minute! How come the lawyer gets a big mansion and I get this raggedy old shack?” St. Peter says, “Well, that’s because heaven is filled with florists. He was our first lawyer.” I hope I can get away with that joke because this coming fall my daughter’s going to be going to law school, so I hope she’ll forgive me for that. I have no doubt that eventually, hopefully many years from now, she’ll be in heaven.

Heaven is a mystery. We’re not sure 100% what heaven will be like or whether heaven exists. I believe heaven does exist. I believe that it will be the most spectacular place we’ve ever been and that we all will go to heaven. Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and even atheists. I believe God has atheists go to heaven just so he can see their shocked faces when they get to heaven. Now this is a sermon about heaven. I’m not going to talk about hell. That’s another sermon for another day. But heaven, I believe, exists, and I believe we get glimpses of heaven on earth. The spectacular day that we have here in Southern California.

Jesus was confronted by some sad Sadducees. I call them sad because they didn’t believe in heaven. They didn’t believe in the resurrection. They wanted to trick Jesus. They thought they had the perfect question to trick Jesus with, but of course Jesus handles it well. They said a woman was married to a man and he died. They didn’t have any children. Moses said that then she should marry his brother. So she does and he dies. They didn’t have any children, so she married his brother and on and on until she married seven brothers and they were childless. Then she died and went to heaven. The Sadducees said, “In heaven, whose wife will she be?” Jesus said, “You guys just don’t get it. Marriage is an earthly concept. There is no marriage in heaven.” I don’t think Jesus was saying that because, if there was marriage in heaven, then it wouldn’t be heaven! I don’t think Jesus was saying that! He’s saying that heaven is different than earth and that, when we are in heaven, we shed our earthly bodies and we will be like angels. Jesus says that “God is God of the living, not God of the dead.” So just as Moses talked about God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God is the God of the living, not of the dead. So when we go to heaven, we will be like angels.

Zombies seem to be a fascination of millennials. I don’t get it. There’s been movies and TV shows about zombies. Apparently, they appeal to millennials. Now you may not believe this, but I am not a millennial. I’m just a little older than that. And I don’t get the fascination with zombies. I’ve seen one zombie movie, “Shaun of the Dead,” which is a comedy. That’s why I saw it. Otherwise, I’m not into zombies. But we will not be zombies in heaven. We will not walk around [holds out arms in front like a zombie and groans], but we’ll be, according to Jesus, “like angels in heaven,” not zombies. God is the God of the living, not of the dead.

King David tells us why God gives us heaven. In Psalm 98, King David says, “Sing to the Lord a new song.” Because God has steadfast love for us. That’s why God gives us heaven, because God loves us. We are God’s children. We were created in God’s image. God wants to have an eternal relationship with us. So God gives us heaven above and we will be filled with love. I’ve read several accounts of near-death experiences where people go to heaven and they see loved ones and they hear beautiful music and they have this enormous feeling of love. I believe that’s what heaven will be like.

God. I try to imagine what God must think, though, when we talk about heaven and we hope for heaven. I wonder if God doesn’t say, “Wait a minute, I give you sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety, a hundred years on earth. I give you the beauty of the earth. I give you spectacular sunrises and magnificent sunsets. I give you the Grand Canyon. I give you the White Cliffs of Dover. I give you the Rhine River. And you want more?! You want eternity?! Isn’t this enough?!” I can hear God saying. Then I think: No, that’s not what God says. God says, “Yes, I’m going to do that. I’m going to give you heaven. This isn’t enough. I’m going to give you eternal life because you are my children.” I would like to spend eternity with my daughter and I believe I will when we’re in heaven. That’s how I feel about my daughter and I’m sure you feel about your children and grandchildren. God must feel even more. So God, I believe, gives us eternity in heaven so God can be with us as our spirit, our soul goes to heaven.

Doug Oldham was a southern Gospel singer. I’d never heard of him until I worked at a Christian radio station. I was a news director back then, but I still had an air show. I said I would spin the spiritual hits. So I would play Doug Oldham and he sang a version of “I’ll Fly Away” that I thought was just heavenly. He was so enthusiastic about it. It was just wonderful. “Some glad morning, when this life is o’er, I’ll fly away. To a home on God’s celestial shore. I’ll fly away. I’ll fly away, O glory, I’ll fly away.” It’s a wonderful song, wonderfully sung by Doug Oldham, if you ever get a chance to hear a recording of it. That’s to me what will happen to us, we will fly away to heaven when we die. We will be resurrected.

Charles Grodin had a talk show on MSNBC many years ago, I think when MSNBC first started. Charles Grodin, the delightful actor. One night he had on a psychic, who claimed he could commune with the dead. People would call in and say, “My mom died a few years ago. Can you contact her on the other side?” The psychic would say, “Yes, I see your mom. She wants you to know she loves you. She’s always loved you. She’ll meet you when you come to heaven.” It went like that for several calls. Then a guy called and said, “Could you contact my dad? He died a few years ago.” The psychic said, “Yes, I see your dad. He wants you to know he loves you. He’s always loved you. When you come to the other side, he’ll be there waiting for you.” The caller said, “Is there anything special about my dad?” The psychic said, “No, I see him. He loves you. He’s always loved you. He’ll meet you when you come to heaven.” The caller asked again, “So, there’s nothing special about my dad?” The psychic said again, “No. He loves you. He’s always loved you. He’ll see you when you come to heaven.” The caller said, “Well, that’s interesting because I’m Patrick Wayne and my dad was John Wayne.” So Charles Grodin and I and Patrick Wayne and the audience were supposed to figure this guy was a fraud because he couldn’t see John Wayne. But maybe in heaven John Wayne is not wearing a ten-gallon hat and cowboy boots and saying, “Well, pilgrim.” (I know that’s a bad impression, but anyway.) Maybe we’re all like angels, as Jesus said, and maybe one angel looks the same as the other and John Wayne isn’t any better or any worse than anybody else in heaven. Now, I kind of hope we have a personality in heaven. We have who we are. I hope that John Wayne is John Wayne in heaven and Eleanor Roosevelt is Eleanor Roosevelt and Gandhi is Gandhi and Dr. King is Dr. King. So I’m not sure that the psychic was necessarily a fraud because he didn’t recognize John Wayne.

Maya Angelou had a poem that I think speaks to our topic today. Maya Angelou, the profound, prophetic poet, wrote a poem, I think about the struggles of women, the struggles of blacks, the struggles of black women, but I think it applies to our topic. The poem is “Still I Rise.” It begins “You may write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies / You may trod me in the very dirt / But still, like dust, I’ll rise.” We’ll rise. We are dust. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. But one day, when we’re dust, our soul, our spirit, our spark will rise. We will become, as Jesus said, like angels. I believe that. This is not all there is. We have eternity waiting for us.

What about you? What do think about heaven? Do you believe in heaven? Do you believe you’re not worthy to be in heaven? I know some people believe they’re not worthy to be in heaven. I hope I can disabuse you of that belief because we are all worthy to be in heaven, we’re all children of God, we’re all made in God’s image. We’re all loved by God, unconditionally. I believe God wants to have an eternal relationship with us somewhere over the rainbow.

Let us pray:

*God of love,*

*Help us to see heaven on earth.*

*Help us to know that there’s heaven above.*

*And help us to know that you love us so much*

*that you want to spend eternity with us in heaven.*

*Now and forevermore.*

*By the power of the Holy Spirit.*

*And in the name of Jesus.*

*Amen.*