

“Heaven Can’t Wait”
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Menifee United Church of Christ

Three ministers were very good friends. So much so that they all went on a vacation together for two weeks. They went to Africa on a safari vacation. When they came back they all had an illness. So they all went together to a doctor, a specialist. The doctor told them, “You all have contracted a rare, deadly disease. You only have a month to live.” The doctor asked them, “What will you do with the month ahead?” The first minister said, “I’m going to sell all that I have and give the money to build a new church.” The second minister said, “With the time that I have left I’m going to go around the world and preach the gospel to everyone.” And the third minister said, “With the time that I have left I’m going to get a second opinion.” Now that minister may believe in heaven, but that minister doesn’t want to get to heaven just yet. Like many of us, that minister wants to push off getting to heaven for a very long time. I guess you could say, “Heaven Can Wait.”

Dr. Eben Alexander had a trip to heaven, he says. Dr. Alexander went into a coma for a week. He said during that time he had a near death experience. He went to heaven. He wrote a book about it called “Proof of Heaven.” He says in heaven he found a spectacular place, as you may imagine. He says he saw God. He said he heard beautiful music all that time. He said he heard a constant sound like “ummm,” not “Om,” but “ummm.” About a week later, he came out of his coma, sat up in his hospital bed, and said, “All is well.” All is well. He says he no longer fears the future. He says he meditates several hours a day to try to recreate what he found in heaven. He says he goes to church quite often now. Before he was a Chreaster, a Christmas and Easter churchgoer. But now he goes to church all the time. Maybe more people need to have a near death experience so they’ll come to church all the time. Anyway, he says that going to heaven has made him a better person. I guess you could say he’s now storing up his treasure in heaven, which is what Jesus talked about.

Jesus told a parable. According to the gospel of Luke, chapter 12, Jesus told the crowd that had gathered around him about a rich man who had an abundant crop. So much so that he didn’t have the room to store his crops. So he said, “I know, I’ll tear down my barns and I’ll build new larger barns.” So he did that. And when he did that, he said, “My soul is now satisfied. I have all that I need for years to come. I can eat, drink, and be merry.” But God said, “You fool! On this night your life is demanded of you.” Then Jesus told us the moral of the story. Jesus said we’re not supposed to store up our riches here on earth. We’re to store up our riches in heaven. We’re to be rich for God. But how do we do that? How can we be rich toward God? By doing what Jesus told us to do: by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and welcoming the stranger. As Jesus said, “Just as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it for me.” Then when we do that, we will be storing up our riches in heaven. We will be acting with compassion and working for justice for people. That is what Jesus would have us do: Act with compassion and work for justice. But what does it mean to act with compassion and work for justice? Let’s talk about compassion first.

Kyle acts with compassion. Kyle is the grandson of Casey, one of the members of our church. Kyle is fifteen. Kyle volunteered to clean up our yard, to cut our grass, to take care of our Peace Garden, to make our church on the outside look really nice. Because Kyle decided to do that, we decided to give him some money to save for his college fund. But Kyle didn’t just take that money and “put it in a new barn,” say. Kyle takes some of that money every week and gives 10% of it to the church. I guess you could say he tithes to the church. He specifically gives money to the Pastor’s Fund, which allows me to give it to people in need. To give it to people who might need a meal or a bus ticket or something else they might need, to do their laundry. Because of Kyle’s generosity, because Kyle acts with compassion, I believe he’s building up his treasures in heaven. And that’s what Jesus would have us do. To kind of create heaven on earth for people in need. To act with compassion.

King David says God acts with compassion. King David says that God satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. That’s what we’re supposed to do. Satisfying the thirsty and filling the hungry with good things. To build up our treasures, not here on earth, but to build up our treasures in heaven by helping people in need here on earth, by satisfying the thirsty and by giving good things to the hungry. We’re to act with compassion.

The people of this church act with compassion. The people of this church take care of those in need, work for justice. This past year the people of this church fed 140 people on Thanksgiving Day, many of those people in need. And then on Christmas Day the people of this church fed 90 people, many of those people in need. The people of this church build up their treasures in heaven. Now there’s talk about what we will do this year. Well, the people of this church are again talking about having Thanksgiving Day dinner for people in need. Maybe we’ll feed more than 140 people in need this year. Christmas is a little problematic because Christmas Day falls on a Sunday. So now there’s talk about maybe doing Christmas dinner the day before Christmas. We’re not sure yet. But I have no doubt that the people of this church will act with compassion for people in need. We’ll try to build heaven on earth for people in need, to do what Jesus and God would want us to do. To act with compassion. And now, what about justice?

The Apostle Paul tells us about justice. According to Colossians, Paul says that God wants us to do the will of God, the will of Jesus; and the will of God and the will of Jesus is for us to do justice. But what is justice? Well, the prophet Micah says, according to Micah 6:8, "God has told you, O mortal, what is good. And what does God require of you, but to do justice?" But again, what is justice? Well, if compassion is helping people in need, then justice is working for ways to ensure people won't be in need any longer. It's like what the late Catholic archbishop Dom Helder Camara of Brazil said, "When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist." Ain't it the truth? Asking why the poor have no food is justice. Getting them into a situation where the poor have no more need for food, where there are no poor, that's justice. That's justice. And we're to work for justice.

Did you watch the conventions the last couple of weeks? The Republican and Democratic Conventions? Now I don't want to talk about politics; God knows I don't like to talk about politics. But, I do want to talk about justice. It seems to me that the 2016 election is all about justice. If paying people a fair wage is a justice issue, then the question is whether voters will support a candidate who wants to raise the minimum wage to fifteen dollars an hour. Or whether voters will support a candidate who wants to eliminate the minimum wage. If equality for women is a justice issue, then the question is whether voters will support a candidate who believes women should be paid the same amount of money as men for doing the same job. Or whether voters will decide to support a candidate who doesn't believe that. If taxes are a justice issue, then the question is whether voters will support a candidate who believes the rich should pay more in taxes or whether voters will support a candidate who believes the rich should pay less in taxes. All of these I believe are justice issues and all of these will probably be decided on November 8th. And I'll probably talk about more justice issues between now and November 8th, because as I say, I believe the 2016 election is all about justice and who voters will be for.

The prophet Hosea says that God is for us. That whatever foolish thing we do, God is for us. God supports whatever we do. Whenever we make mistakes, God will bring us home, according to Hosea Chapter 11. God is for us. You could almost say that because God will bring us home that God is like our designated driver. Whatever foolish thing we do, God will bring us to our earthly home and God will bring us to our heavenly home. That's because God created us. We are children of God, made in God's image. God loves us. God blesses us. God loves us unconditionally. That's what God does. God loves us.

One of God's children showed love for this church. Griffen, of West Hills California, which, they tell me, is in the LA area, saw a story about this church a couple of weeks ago. The story about how our church was broken into, our safe was stolen, and we had several hundred dollars stolen from us. That angered Griffen. He saw the story on Channel 4 in LA and he wrote us a letter. He said he supports what we do. Griffen is a gay man and he liked the fact that we support gay rights. So he sent us a check and he said he'll pray for us. He'll pray that God protects us. Now you may think that God didn't protect us when we were robbed, but those were just our earthly riches. Those were riches stored up here on earth. Griffen and God know that we store our treasures in heaven. That's what we do. That's what we do by acting with compassion and working for justice. Griffen says he used to go to church, but he doesn't go to church anymore because the church that he used to go to made him feel like a "second-class citizen," made him feel "sinful," made him feel "marginalized." As I say, he supports what we do and he says he'll pray to God to protect us. And I believe God will protect us. For years to come. Because this church does build up its treasures in heaven by caring for those in need, by showing compassion to those in need, and by working for justice for people in need. I believe this church will always be protected by God because of it.

Let us pray...
God of love,
Help us to always work for justice.
Help us to always act with compassion.
And help us to always build up our treasures in heaven.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.