

1 Peter 3:15-22

6th Sunday after Easter

May 24, 1987

~~and~~ He descended into hell. We say it together each time we confess our faith. ^{through the Conf.} Jesus Christ descended into hell. ~~and~~ Though I have preached sermons on every other line in ~~the~~ creed, I have never preached nor heard preached a sermon on the line, "He descended ~~into~~ into hell." ^{until today} ~~when this sermon is over, maybe you'll know why.~~

The reason today is the day for this sermon is because of our second lesson for today, from 1 Peter ^{5:18-20 which reads:} ~~which contains this line:~~ For Christ also died for sins once ~~and~~ for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but ~~made~~ made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is eight persons were saved through water." ~~that is~~ ^{4:6} ~~And then a little way down the page the purpose of this preaching is described:~~ For this is why the gospel ~~was~~ preached even to the dead, that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God!"

Peter tells us that Christ having died in the flesh, was made alive in the spirit, and that he preached to those in hell in order that they might ^{made} be alive in the spirit as he was. Though ~~they~~ were rightly judged in the flesh because of their sin, Christ preached to them that through his righteousness they might be saved.

It makes me uncomfortable today to even say that. For we understand a death to be a dividing line, when it comes the test is over, the teacher says put down your pencils, there is no time for another phrase, another word, whatever you bring before God is done. Yet this passage from 1 Peter indicates that for at least those alive at the time of the flood, there was a second chance, ~~Christ~~ preached to them that they might believe and be made alive in the spirit.

Where Jesus is, everything is changed, the powers of evil are overcome,

death is defeated, life begins again. In dusty Galilee, when Jesus touched ~~the~~ blind man, God's power of healing, of wholeness entered in. When Jesus blessed the loaves and fish they became abundant. Even when a woman snuck up behind him and touched his garment, the life giving power of God entered into her. Jesus spoke to a girl, to Lazarus, both of them dead and they became alive again. So it was when Jesus died, died in the same way each of us die, descending to the place of the dead. He ~~spoke~~ ^{went to make that} ~~and~~ ^{might} ~~life enter~~ ⁱⁿ ~~there~~ also. How? I do not know. I only know that where Jesus is, nothing is left the same. He always enters in to claim everything that is God's for God. And so it is that Peter also tells us that Christ not only has descended into hell but he has also gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities and powers subject to him. ^{Christ is Lord.} ~~bring everything in the earth and under the earth~~ As Paul writes in Phillipians: Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Sometimes we talk and act as if Christ only has to do with here, in this little place, or ~~in~~ that he is only for western culture, but God sent his Christ so that every tongue, living and dead might confess him as Lord.

He descended into hell. I've always said it as if it is the sad part of the creed. The dead part. But when ~~Jesus~~ Peter confessed, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God, ~~and~~ Jesus said to him, You are the rock and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Those gates are the gates of the prison, to keep the unrighteous in. But Christ descended into hell to break open those gates that everyone might confess him as Lord.

He descended into hell, certainly nothing in all that is can keep him from doing his will. Nothing.

Christ also died for sins, once for all, the ~~w~~ighteous for the unrighteous. How hard it is for those words to penetrate, the righteous for the

unrighteous.

When I went prepared for this sermon on Jesus descending to ~~the~~ hell, I thought it wise to turn to Genesis to reread the account of the flood for Peter specifically says it was to ~~the~~ one alive during the building of the ark that Jesus preached. I started reading and these were the words I encountered. These are the generations of Noah, Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.

Christ died for the unrighteous ~~xxxxxx~~.

The flood washed over all the unrighteous, Noah the righteous man was saved. But now Christ has given that his death might be applied to all the unrighteous, those kept in prison.

A pilot releases a rocket. Thirty seven lives are stopped. We are angry. Within us there is desire for revenge.

Tomorrow the thirty seven will be remembered in speeches ~~be~~ across our land. The need for a strong defense will be declared, the cost of freedom will be displayed by holding up these lives. And through many of those speeches hearts will be moved ^{to} ~~toward~~ anger toward Arabs just as once the anger was toward Germans and Japanese, and before that the Spanish, and ~~before~~ before that the southerners and before that the English and before that the Indians. And we are gathered to worship a Lord who died for the unrighteous.

It is a hard pill to swallow. I want Justice. God wants forgiveness. I want judgement. God wants mercy. I want a world divided into the saved and the damned, and God wants every tongue to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

We have two flages here. The American, the Christian. God has placed each of us in both realms. In America, in Christ. They are not the same. Yet the love and devotion to both is in the same person, me, the same person, you. But Christ is supreme, he must rule over our being Americans.

Arab pilots are God's creatures. Though they may not acknowledge Christ, Christ wants them every bit as much as he wants me.

Christ died for the unrighteous, for me, and for 37 sailors and for an

Arab pilot. Christ died for the unrighteous, for Jewish children butchere
by a Nazi name Klaus Barbie and for that Nazi himself. Christ even descended
into hell to preach to the people God had been so angry with that the had
almost destroyed his whole creation. He preached to them that he might
bring even them to God.

Who is this Christ. He is a light of love so pure, so intense that there
is no darkness of hatred or revenge in him. He is the light of God's love
that can pray for the very one's who put him to death, Father, forgive them
for they know not what they do.
God wants to make you like him.