

### Media and Graphics Notes

<b>Word of Witness Video?</b>	No
<b>Sermon Starter Video?</b>	Yes
<b>Sermon Notes?</b>	There are several scriptures, as well as one picture to show on screen during the sermon
<b>Other Notes</b>	UMW Sunday

### Key Questions, Metadata and Outline

#### ***What is this sermon about?***

This sermon is about the afterlife, what we can anticipate and how to live in paradise.

#### ***Why is this sermon important?***

This sermon is important because what we believe about the afterlife affects the way that we live our lives today.

#### ***What is the context of this sermon?***

This is the second sermon in the *Good Grief* series. It has been developed using the sermon series by the same name which was preached at The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in 2012. You can find more information about that series at <http://j.mp/1A0iBvF>.

#### ***What are the next action steps?***

Don't be afraid of death.  
Follow Christ all of your days.  
Live knowing that you will be with Christ in paradise.

#### ***What is the good news (bottom line)?***

The good news is that when we call on Jesus, he welcomes us into paradise no matter how righteous or unrighteous we have been in the past.

#### ***Metadata***

1. Topic(s)
  1. Changing Lives
  2. Sharing Christ
2. Sermon Books of the Bible



1. John
2. Luke
3. Revelation
3. Series
  1. Good Grief - Facing Death with Hope
4. Speaker
  1. Andrew Conard
5. Tags
  1. sermon, worship, church, Methodist, United Methodist, United Methodist Church, First United Methodist Church, El Dorado, Kansas, Great Plains Annual Conference, life, afterlife, gehenna, paradise, sheol, hades, hope, universe, Jesus, heaven, believe, resurrection

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## Revelation 21:1-5, CEB

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "Look! God's dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look! I'm making all things new." He also said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

### Response to Scripture

One: The Word of God for the People of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

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## Introduction

### Sermon Starter Video

Play sermon starter video.

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\*\*\* Start Sermon Timer \*\*\*

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### Series Review

What we believe about death profoundly shapes how we live life. Each of us faces death regularly—whether it is the stories on the evening news, or the loss of someone we love. We have questions about death and ultimately we want to know how to face our own mortality with courage and hope.

### Sermon Notes and Scripture Study

I invite you to open your bulletin to a place where you can take notes during the message today. Today, I hope that you will hear:

- Something new or find new questions
- Perspective on your life or something in your life that gives additional meaning to the message today.
- Guidance about how to live as a disciple of Jesus.

I invite you to write down some of the things that you hear in the sermon today and take your bulletin home as a tool to grow in your faith outside of worship. You can reflect on what you heard today, pray for people of our congregation and read scripture to prepare for worship next week.

## Opening

### Prayer

Will you pray with me? O God, use these words to speak good news so that as individuals and as a congregation we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

### Pastoral Log - Funerals

I began serving as a United Methodist preacher in July of 2006.

During that time, I have officiated at 51 funerals

37 since I have been here in El Dorado – an average just over one a month.

At every one, many people wonder the same thing. What happened to my loved one? Where are they now? What is heaven like?

Today, I want to address some of the questions that you may have about the afterlife. There are far more questions that could be addressed in the afterlife than I have time to mention today. I will address a few of them in the eNote this Wednesday, so make sure to take a look when it comes. Or if you haven't signed up, you can do so at our website.

### Transition

Let's begin with a look at what the Bible teaches us about the afterlife.

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## Sheol: The Afterlife in the Old Testament

The Old Testament talks very little about the afterlife. What we do find in the Old Testament is the concept of Sheol.

Sheol is a Hebrew word that has the same meaning as the Greek word, Hades.

**Sheol = Hades**

Sheol and hades do not mean hell.

They were not necessarily a place of punishment.

The Jews believed that everyone went to sheol. If you are a human being, you have a soul. After you die, your soul goes to sheol - the realm of the dead.

There was an understanding that there were two areas within hades or sheol.

Some souls go to the place where the unrighteous go, which is called Gehenna

Some souls go to the place where the righteous go, which is called paradise.

**Gehenna**

**Paradise**

### Transition

Let's first take a look at Gehenna, the place where the unrighteous go.

### Gehenna

Gehenna was the name of a valley located near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

In ancient times, Gehenna was the place where people sacrificed their children to the Canaanite gods. As a result, it was understood to be an evil place or where a place where people who are doing evil would go.

During the time that the New Testament was being written, this valley was a trash dump for the city of Jerusalem. You would take your trash there and there were people who were paid to burn the trash. So, picture a valley where there is a terrible smell and there are fires constantly burning the trash with smoke wafting through the valley. This was Gehenna.

Gehenna made sense as a metaphor to explain the place in sheol, the realm of the dead, where the unrighteous go. It was like Gehenna where the fires never die and where refuse is burned away.

### ***Transition***

The other place, where the righteous go, was called paradise.

### **Paradise**

The word paradise came from the Persian language and it literally meant the king's garden.

You remember that in the ancient near east, kings would have fabulous gardens. They were part arboretum and part zoo. If you were invited to the Kings garden, you would see these incredible animals which you might never see.

There were fountains and water features, beautiful plants and things to eat. It was a place of amazing beauty.

When people thought about paradise and the afterlife, this was the most beautiful thing they could imagine. The place where the righteous go in the realm of the dead was paradise – the Kings' garden.

This reminded people of the garden of Eden, where God planted a garden where there were the most beautiful things to see and experience. Paradise was what had been lost in the garden of Eden.

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## **Ancient Understanding of the Universe**

### **Heavens, Earth and Sheol**

This was the picture of how the world was organized in the ancient world.

There were the heavens above. God's throne was in the heavens, the angels are in the heavens.

Then you have the earth, which is where we live – the realm of the living.

Then you had sheol or hades.

When people died, their souls went to hades or sheol.

Within sheol there are two areas: Gehenna, where the unrighteous dwell and paradise, which is where the righteous dwell.

This is the picture that the Bible paints for us of the afterlife.

## **This Age and The Age to Come**

The Jews also believed that one day the Messiah would come and usher in a new age – the age to come. God’s throne would move from heaven to earth and God would dwell among God’s people in a way that had not before been experienced. The dead would be raised from paradise and brought back to life in some kind of physical form – a spiritual body.

This is what we find in the passage which was read just a few moments ago. The present age, in which we live, is torn apart by sin, brokenness, hate, suffering, pain and sorrow. When the new heaven and new earth is here, there will be no more crying or sadness. This is part of our hope – that one day Christ will come again to usher in the age to come.

### ***Transition***

So, what about until then?

What happens when we die?

Where do we go?

The scriptures suggest that when we die, we go to the realm of the dead and wait for the second coming - either in paradise or Gehenna.

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## **Jesus and the Afterlife**

Jesus would have had this understanding of the afterlife.

### **Rich Man and Lazarus**

We see it in his parables, like the Rich Man and Lazarus in which he describes two men who die and one goes to hades and the other to be with Abraham, another way which the Jews talked about being in paradise when your soul is in sheol.

### **Jesus on the Cross**

We see it when Jesus is hanging on the cross. You remember that there were two others who were being crucified that day - one on his right and one on his left. Hear their conversation from



### Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus insulted him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

Responding, the other criminal spoke harshly to him, "Don't you fear God, seeing that you've also been sentenced to die? We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus replied, "I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus says the their will join him in paradise – the realm of the dead where the righteous go.

### **Transition**

This gives you some understanding of the way the afterlife is depicted in the Bible. So, what does heaven or paradise look like?

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## **What is heaven like?**

### **Descriptions of Heaven**

Whatever heaven is like, it is mind blowing.

It is far more than we can comprehend.

The biblical authors try to give us metaphors of what paradise looks like so that we can understand. This is where we get the idea of streets of gold or pearly gates.

There may or may not be literal pearly gates or streets of gold.

What the biblical authors are helping us do is to imagine the most beautiful thing you have ever seen and the most valuable thing you can imagine.

In paradise, those things are all over the place.

It is even more beautiful than the most beautiful thing you can imagine.

The most common metaphor in the Bible for heaven or paradise is that of a banquet. It is like a banquet, a feast, a celebration, a party. Within that category, most often it is described as the wedding banquet.

### **Wedding Banquet in Ancient Times**

Let me tell you about a wedding banquet in ancient times.

Most people lived day to day. They had just enough, most of the time. The time in your life when you actually got to feast like a king was when someone was getting married. The moment you had a child, you started saving up for their wedding. When they were married, you threw a party for them. It wasn't just a two or three hour reception after the wedding, it lasted for seven days.

You invited all of your friends and neighbors to come. You served the finest food and drink. It was your chance to live like a king. You had musicians, dancing, singing and laughing. It was the most awesome experience of your life.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 23:39-43, CEB.

If you lived a subsistence living, when you talked about the high points of your life, almost always they were the wedding banquet.

So, Revelation describes the wedding banquet of the lamb that takes place when Christ returns. Jesus talks about the king who prepares a wedding banquet for his son and invites everyone to come.

This is the picture that we have of what paradise looks like.

## **Our Wedding Reception**

When I was thinking about this, I thought about our own wedding reception.

Nicole and I were married at her home church in Clemmons, North Carolina. We visited a dozen places to determine where to hold the reception and decided that the best place was in the church fellowship hall.

We had a great time.

There was a delicious dinner, fantastic cake.

We even had a chocolate fountain.

Our family was there.

My friends from Kansas were there.

Nicole's friends from North Carolina were there.

Our friends from seminary were there.

We danced and laughed.

This week, I looked back at our wedding photos and remembered again – what an incredible day. One of the pictures that I looked at when I was preparing this sermon was taken as we were getting ready to leave the party.



The joy that you can see on our faces in this picture.  
It was one of the best moments of our lives.  
Even this doesn't begin to come close to the joy of paradise.

### **Transition**

Yet, some people ask, Why do you believe in everlasting life?

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## **Why Believe in Everlasting Life?**

### **Jesus believed it**

I believe in the resurrection and everlasting life because Jesus believed in it.  
I follow Jesus.

I believe that what Jesus says are true. I believe that he came from God, that he was God, so I take seriously what he said. Jesus said things like, these words from

John 11:25-26

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"<sup>2</sup>

Then these words which I read at every funeral, from

John 14:1-4

"Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I'm going."<sup>3</sup>

I believe that what Jesus says is true and Jesus did more than talk about it.  
He showed us.

### **Jesus showed us**

He was crucified.

He died and he was buried.

On third day, he rose again. The tomb was empty and over the next 40 days, as many as 500 people saw him at one time. The disciples wrote these things down and were ready to die for the truth that they had seen the risen Christ.

Jesus didn't just talk about the resurrection. He showed us.

Here it is.

This is what it looks like.

Because I live, you shall live also.

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<sup>2</sup> John 11:25-26, CEB.

<sup>3</sup> John 14:1-4, CEB.

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## Conclusion

You remember the story of the thief next to Jesus?  
That day he is with Jesus in paradise.  
This man had been a thief and a murderer – he was not righteous.  
So how does he get to go to paradise?  
He called on Jesus while he is hanging on the cross.  
He says, Jesus remember me.  
This is all it took.  
Jesus welcomed him into paradise.

## Good News

The good news is that when we call on Jesus, he welcomes us into paradise no matter how righteous or unrighteous we have been in the past.  
God offers us mercy and salvation in Jesus.  
We are covered by the righteousness of Christ.

## Call to Action

So, don't be afraid of death.  
Follow Christ all of your days.  
Live knowing that you will be with Christ in paradise.

## Invitation

You can have faith and hope for life and the afterlife when you put your trust in Jesus.

## Closing Prayer

[Text here]  
Amen.

	8:30 AM	11:00 AM
Sermon Time		