

Getting the Essentials of SALVATION (who gets to go home)

Isaiah 55: 1- 7, 1 Timothy 2:1-6

And Peter replied , “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, **everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.***” Acts 2:38-39

Today’s message is in many ways, the flip side of last week’s. Indeed it picks up where we left off with the warning: If you hear God calling you – you had better not ignore that call.

And so with that thought in mind we move on to the how of God’s calling and what if we do or do not respond.

Perhaps the two most evocative words in our English language were both, best spoken, by aliens. The first was when a gentle extraterrestrial, explaining his sadness to his young friend Elliot, points a glowing finger skyward and simply says “**home.**”

The second is when the cartoon “monster” Stitch, in a Walt Disney movie, discovers that he has become part of a real family. And repeats what his young friend Lilo taught him: “***Ohana means family, family means nobody gets left behind. Or forgotten.***”

Home. Family. Why do these two words seem to rattle around within a hollow in our soul, provoking our own incurable longing to return to someplace called home and to find an eternal family somewhere in the peaceable kingdom of our imaginations?

I believe that hollow was put there on purpose by our own loving parental God, who is described in today’s scripture as desiring for “***everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.***” And who also, as the Apostle Paul explained in his sermon on Mars Hill, appointed our times, boundaries, and places of existence specifically to provoke us “***to search for God, to grope for him, and find him – though He is indeed not far from each one of us.***” (Acts 17:26-27).

Thus, one of the first essential truths of Salvation is that the eternally existing, all powerful, all creating **God of the Universe - thinks of himself as our parent - and that this parental God loves us and wants to save all of us, his erring children; every single human who has ever lived on this planet.** So when Jesus declared that God so loved **the world** that he sent his own son to seek and to save the lost..... he wasn’t exaggerating.

Which brings up one of the greatest mysteries of Salvation – according to the Bible – that God will not get all those whom he wants. Not every human being will be saved.

What I mean, is that the Bible teaches that, along with **Heaven**, there is a also place called **Hell** – originally designed to hold Satan and his fallen angels – but it will also serve to those humans who

refuse to accept God's offered gift of salvation, for those who refuse to be adopted into the family of God.

Which leads us to ask ...

- Is Hell a real place? Or is it just part of a fairy tale designed to scare us all into Heaven.
- Who gets to go home to Heaven?
- And who and why might some be left out?

The Rev. Rob Bell, a young and popular pastor theologian, recently scandalized the Evangelical Christian community, meaning those who believe in the reality of Hell, by writing a book: **LOVE WINS**. In which he speculates that perhaps God does finally save, somehow, someday, everyone: that every human, at least, does finally get to go home. And the main point of his argument is "Why can't the all sovereign, all powerful, ruler of the universe – who has declared his desire to save everyone – get all of what He says he wants?"

That's a good question. Theologically, that question, that concept of God somehow eventually saving everyone, is called **Universalism**

In my heart, I wish **UNIVERSALISM** were true – I wish everyone got to go home. And I can show you some Bible verses - that God **wishes** the same thing as well.

How about you? Do you want for everyone to get to go home to Heaven?
Or are there some whom you would happily consign to Hell?
Think about that for a moment.

But, sadly, Universalism is not a concept that the Bible teaches.

So that question of why everyone doesn't get to go home can only be answered when we meet God face-to-face.

Therefore, – in this life at least – we must teach what the Bible teaches: **which is our need to choose life, our need to respond** to God's call --- and having responded, our need to share the message around so that everyone gets a chance to respond.

and we must accept by faith what little the Bible does say about Heaven and Hell – trusting the ultimate resolution of all such matters to God – who is the only one in control of such anyway.

And ultimately the most important thing for you or I to know about Hell is that it was Jesus – God in the flesh – who **defined** the concept, **named** the place, who **talked the most about it**, and who **warned** us not to end up there.

Matthew 10:28 *Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Matthew 8:11-12 *I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*

Luke 16:23 *The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side*

Matthew 23:33 And to those who opposed his message, Jesus said *You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?*

So, to those who question the existence of such a location, we must ask why would Jesus talk so much about a place and give such warnings – if no human was ever really in danger of leaving this life un-saved ... and ending up in Hell.

Therefore, at least taking warning from the negative let us rather focus on the positive question of Salvation. Which is ... **What is the message that Jesus has charged us to share, about how anyone get saved and who gets to go home?**

Jesus left this commission with his apostles – and we who have come after them – to take his message, his “Good news” of God’s offered salvation into all the world. To baptize and disciple the nations and to teach them everything that we have been taught.

So what is the message of salvation that Jesus want us to share with the world? Let us look to the simplest dearest verses in our Bible for an answer.

John 3.16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Whenever sharing the message of God’s offered salvation, Jesus always gave the invitation to **EVERYONE** who could hear and respond to it. And think about that the word **EVERY – ONE** carries within it meaning an individual need to respond. The word does not imply that **ALL** people will be saved only that **all who respond** will be saved.

Matthew 7.8:

For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matt. 7:24 Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

Matthew 10.32:

Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven

Matthew 22.9:

Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”

John 11.26:

and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

John 18.37:

Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'

So then the responsibility that Jesus laid upon us is to be like a farmer sowing the seed, or likes the servants inviting anyone they could find to the wedding banquet. Our charge is to share the message everywhere we go and let those who have the ears to hear respond. Because it is those who respond who get to go home.

In that light, let me close by sharing with you one of Jesus' final parables on the kingdom of heaven – The message is only thinly veiled – it is easy to interpret, to see what part we play in the story, and to understand the final outcome of those who refuse God's call.

Matthew 22:1-10 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet." But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them.

The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." For many are called, but few are chosen.'

So friends, the essential truth of Salvation, of who gets to go home is this:

WE know that God loves and wants to save the whole world.

We also know that this gift of salvation is given, not indiscriminately to ALL

But to EVERYONE who hears and responds.

And then we who have responded are further charged to continue spreading the invite.

Just like chain mail – send this message on to ten of your best friends.

WE are the servants that God has sent out into the highway to invite everyone to the banquet ...
Let us all work to insure that God's banqueting table is filled.
That Heaven is as full as possible
And Hell as small as possible

Let us join with God, the Father, in inviting everyone to come home.