

Devotional, Monday November 16, 2020
Proper 28, the week of the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Margaret of Scotland. (See below.)

Daily Office Lectionary Readings

AM Psalm 89:1-18; PM Psalm 89:19-52

Hab. 2:1-4,9-20; James 2:14-26; Luke 16:19-31

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, Book of Common Prayer

Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, Book of Common Prayer

Compline (Night Prayer), Page 127, Book of Common Prayer

Daily Office Gospel, Luke 16:19-31

19 “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. 24 He called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.” 25 But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.” 27 He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— 28 for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.” 29 Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.” 30 He said, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” 31 He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.””

David’s Reflections

The concept of eternal separation from God lies behind this parable, like a tapestry hanging as a backdrop behind a stage. A study of contemporary Jewish

literature reveals that Jesus was drawing on a popular image of the intermediate state of people after death, where the abodes of the righteous and of the unrighteous were contiguous. Their final state, after resurrection and judgment, does not come into view here. We cannot use this story as a proof text to prove that Jesus believed in a hell with literal fire. The point of his story lies elsewhere, with the images of hell serving as backdrop.

Even if Jesus refers to a popular notion for purposes of telling his parable, it would be difficult to imagine his telling a parable like this had he not believed that lack of faith put people eternally at risk. For him to draw on these popular images while himself not believing that people are eternally at risk without faith would involve a serious breach of integrity.

The New Testament witness to the fate of unbelievers leaves one with room for different viewpoints. Even conservative theologians have acknowledged this in the publishing of a book entitled *Four Views on Hell*, now in a second edition. My own reading and rereading has convinced me that the New Testament writers expected an unimaginable triumph from God's missionary efforts, that God would succeed in bringing most of humanity to Godself. Yet, those same writers seem to leave room for an unredeemed remnant, a minority who, like this wealthy man, manage to remain blind and unresponsive in spite of all God's efforts.

What will happen to those people? Some texts point to some sort of shadowy existence apart from God, but not an existence involving physical torment. Other texts hint that those who resist all God's loving initiatives might simply cease to exist. Yet, others point toward some form of universal salvation. Any outcome defies my efforts to imagine; the negative possibilities simply feel hideous, especially when I think of people I know and care about who seem to be at risk.

Every belief has a corresponding imperative built in. If we believe something, how will we express that in our lives? If we are convinced, no matter how unpleasant the idea, that people without faith might be at risk, what should we be doing about that? At the least, we should be giving ourselves in witness and service for the sake of those we love, those who lack faith or whose faith is known to God alone. For me, the greatest risk of living apart from faith has to do, not with what happens at death, but rather with what happens every day. People living apart from faith live without a conscious awareness of divine love, without ultimate purpose and meaning, and without loving community. Their plight provides ample motive for engaging in God's mission to gather all to the divine love.

Collect of the Day, Proper 28, the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 236)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Margaret, Queen of Scotland (died 16 Nov 1093 CE).
http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Margaret_Scotland.htm

Collect of the Feast of Margaret, Queen of Scotland

O God, who called your servant Margaret to an earthly throne that she might advance your heavenly kingdom, and gave her zeal for your church and love for your people: Mercifully grant that we also may be fruitful in good works, and attain to the glorious crown of your saints; though Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for the Renewal of Life

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness while it was day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 99)

Of the Incarnation

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 252)

A Prayer for Light

Almighty God, we give you thanks for surrounding us, as daylight fades, with the brightness of the vesper light; and we implore you of your great mercy that, as you enfold us with the radiance of this light, so you would shine into our hearts the brightness of your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 110)

A Collect for Mission

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near:

Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 100, 257)