

“A Glimpse of Heaven”

John 14:23-29

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

On this Memorial Day Weekend, I give thanks for all veterans, especially my father who served in the Navy. He was an avid outdoorsman who died two weeks after we moved here in 2003. We shared some glimpses of heaven.

In the movie “River Wild,” Meryl Streep is a river guide, guiding rafts down a beautiful Rocky Mountain River. She spent her life guiding rafts down a beautiful and scenic part of the river until bank robbers abduct her and force her to guide them down the river in their attempt to escape. They force her to run a part of the river called the “gauntlet” which no one has ever survived.

The movie was filmed on the Kootenai River that runs down from the Rocky Mountains through Libby, Montana which is located in the far northwest corner of Montana. Libby is a town of about 5,000 people located in a pristine valley surrounded by mountain peaks.

If you were to ask my Dad, or myself, after we trout fished on the Kootenai River and walked the surrounding mountains taking in herds of mule and white tail deer, moose lazily walking alongside us on logging roads, and bighorn sheep watching us from an adjacent ridge as we climbed their mountain; we would tell you what Dad told a native as we stood on his back deck overlooking the river, “When you die and leave this place, heaven can’t be more than a couple of notches different”.

A couple of days after Dad described the river and the surrounding mountains as a “couple of notches from heaven,” we found ourselves floating and paddling down the Kootenai

River in a rubber river raft while casting our lines and pulling in bright colored rainbow trout. As we sipped on “Moose’s Drool,” a local beverage, my dad wondered out loud how life could get any better than this.

For me it was a wonderful opportunity to get reacquainted with Jeremy and Kendra, who when I had last seen them as their pastor in Rolette, North Dakota, were high school sweethearts and I was Jeremy’s high school football coach and weightlifting partner. Our Rachel was born in Rolette, while Nathan and Micah were born in Fargo. Jeremy and Kendra had three girls. Jeremy also is an avid outdoorsman who was our river and mountain guide.

It was an opportunity to spend time with my father. Jeremy and Kendra gave us wonderful mountain Montana hospitality while staying in their basement and feasting at mealtime on deer, elk, fish, and bighorn sheep, not to mention the moose’s drool. It really was a “couple of notches from heaven.”

All of us have a different “vision” of what heaven will be like based on our experiences in this life on earth. In our second lesson from Revelation 22, John has a vision of heaven. He, too, describes a beautiful river surrounded by lush vegetation with God on his throne.

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on

their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

John gives us a vision of heaven in which God is visible, in which God is the light where there is no more night or darkness. It is a vision in which God is eternally present and through his presence we are in eternal relationship with him.

We get glimpses of heaven here on earth when we’re rafting down a river bright as crystal and the water is so clear you can always see the bottom.

We get glimpses of heaven here on earth when we hold our newborn grandchild for the first time and when the cleansing water of baptism is poured over their heads a few months later.

We get glimpses of heaven here on earth when we come to the Lord’s table to taste the bread and wine of the Lamb and experience a foretaste of the eternal heavenly banquet.

We get glimpses of heaven here on earth when we’re laying in an I.C.U. hospital bed recovering from surgery and we feel the warmth of the Holy Spirit surrounding us, filling us, and healing us or today when we come to the kneeling rail to bring to God whatever is ailing us, Physical or spiritual, and to receive prayers for healing.

We get glimpses of heaven here on earth when we’re sitting beside, and holding the hand of a loved one when he or she takes their last breath and we feel the presence of Christ leading that person from this life and into the next.

Some denominations call these glimpses of heaven, “born again” experiences when we know and feel the presence of God in our daily life. We are all “born again” every time we are

blessed by God with a glimpse of heaven. We are all born again every time we feel the presence of God in and around us.

Jesus tells us many times, and again in this morning's Gospel text, that he will be with us, that we will feel and experience his presence in this life and the life to come.

Once again, we are in the upper room in Jerusalem the night before his crucifixion. Jesus has washed our feet and passed around the bread and the wine of the Last Supper. Jesus has given his disciples a glimpse of what is to come, a glimpse of heaven.

As they lounge around the upper room, Jesus reminds us that we can't simply say we love Jesus and then do as we please. When we choose to love and follow Jesus, we also choose to keep his Word, to keep his commandments. Jesus reminds us that love and commandment-keeping are interconnected choices that we must make every day. Jesus doesn't force us to love him any more than he forces us to do good over evil. Instead, he respects us enough to give us the freedom to choose.

When we make the choice to love and follow Jesus, we are given a wonderful gift – one that makes it easier to choose wisely in the future. This gift is the presence and power of a Lord who comes to us and makes his home with us here and now. It is a glimpse of heaven.

Verse 23 – Jesus said, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them”.

Jesus tells us this morning that he and God will dwell in all of us who live in love and obedience and that the Holy Spirit will come to teach us and Christ himself will give us His peace.

Verses 26-27 – “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”

Jesus promises his presence with us. Jesus promises us glimpses of heaven on the river, in the birthing room, at the baptismal font, in the bread and wine, in the hospital bed, and in saying goodbye to a loved one.

When we make the choice to love and follow Jesus, we are given the gift of his presence and power. It’s a powerful incentive.

And yet, even though we want to love and obey God with all our hearts, even though God gives us glimpses of heaven along the way, we still fall short in disobedience and sin. Jesus knew he would have to go to dark Gethsemane the next day. We gather here to give thanks and praise for his self-sacrifice and the glimpse of heaven on this Sunday morning.

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.”

May the peace of God . . .

#785 – When Peace Like a River