



**Sermons from St. Marks  
United Church of Christ  
New Albany, Indiana**



**For All the Saints  
Text: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10  
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What happens to us when we die?

Death is an important issue and a part of every person's life no matter what our situation in life is. Very often in church we reflect upon things in the Bible and we are careful to note that many of the customs and ways people lived in Biblical times are different from us.

If we travel around the world we find many different cultures who live in many different ways.

One thing all people from every age and every culture have is our mortality. Our lives on this earth will one day come to an end.

Frankly, people don't know how to deal with death.

Sometimes people make something of a joke about it. In the last century the epitaph's on people's graves became something of a work of heart.

In one cemetery in Pennsylvania there is a tombstone that reads:

Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake. He stepped on the gas instead of the brake.

On Boot Hill Cemetery in Tombstone there is an epitaph that reads:

Here lies Lester Moore; Four Slugs from a .44. No Les, No More

In one cemetery the grave of an atheist reads:

Here lies an atheist, all dress up and no place to go.

Perhaps the best one is from a cemetery in Alabama:

Solomon Peas. Peas is not here, only the Pod. Peas shelled out and went home to God.

Sometimes in coping with the issue of death we make light of it.

Sometimes we live in total denial about death as well. Several years ago a Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland made the news in their way of not dealing with the issue of death. When patients in the Hospital passed away the Hospital blamed the patient on their own death by writing:

The patient failed to live up to his wellness potential.

St. Paul does not avoid the subject, however. He writes in this passage, first about life, and then about death.

Of life he says that we live in something of a tabernacle.

In our day and age tabernacles are either like churches, cathedrals, or in Roman Catholic Churches a place where they keep Holy Communion. Paul was not speaking of a building or a place to hold a Sacrament. For Paul, the world tabernacle was the same as a tent. The tabernacle was the special tent. Paul's allusion is that living life on earth is like living in a tent.

My idea of living a rough life is when someone else is holding the TV remote. I am a rugged indoors man and so I can't say that I have thoroughly enjoyed living in the great outdoors.

But I have slept in tents and there are two things which I came way from the experience learning.

First, living in a tent is insecure. Sometimes, in our houses, it's amazing to hear the wind howl. The whole house shakes. Living in a tent would be much worse.

I don't know if this is still the way tents are made, but when I was in the Boy Scouts when went camping in tents and it began to rain. One of my friends wondered if it was true that if you touched the top of the tent you could make it leak. We all tried it--and it was true. The rain leaked on us all night.

Besides that I once went camping and the forest rangers told us to beware of the bears. Somehow the canvas of the tent didn't provide me much bear-safety assurance.

In addition to being insecure, tents are also uncomfortable. They don't have air-conditioning or heat or running water. Sleeping bags are nice--but give me my own covers. The ground can be nice, but it's certain no mattress.

When you get down to it, our lives are like living in a tent. We really don't have much security and we do spend a great deal of time being uncomfortable. St. Paul was right in his analysis of life.

But then Paul speaks of something else. He reminds us that we can never be totally secure and comfortable while we are home in our bodies, because as we are at home in our bodies, we are separated from the Lord--which means that to be separated from our bodies is to be one with the Lord.

In numerous places St. Paul writes about heaven and being joined with God.

In his writings, St. Paul gives us four words which describe heaven and being one with God.

The first word is permanence. A tent can collapse. Our lives on earth can collapse. Nothing, we are taught, is forever. But heaven us. God is giving us a permanent place to be.

The second word is perfection. Life on earth is difficult and imperfect. It is, at its very best, very, very difficult. Yet, we are taught that life with God is perfect.

Billy Graham tells a wonderful story about this. He said that right before his Grandmother died she sat up in bed and said, "There's Ben waiting for me--and he has two legs and two eyes."

What made this so compelling was that Billy Graham's grandfather, Ben, had lost a leg and an eye at Gettysburg during the Civil War. His grandmother's vision of him was that he was made whole--he was made perfect.

The third word is the word people. I'm really convinced that when we get to heaven we're going to run into all the people we've ever wanted to know--and we're going to have great reunions with people we have known. Heaven will be a time of re-connection with those people who have known and loved.

People occasionally scoff at this, but do you remember the story of Jesus meeting the apostles on the beach after the resurrection. They came to recognize him. Jesus had died and was resurrected. When we get to heaven, the Bible is reminding us that we are recognizable to others. It means that we'll be able to reunite with loved ones. What wonderful reunions there will be.

The final word to describe heaven is praise. There will be no barriers in our relationship with God. We will be able to see God face to face; we will be able to look God right in the eye.

In the movie O God there was a wonderful scene with George Burns as God and John Denver as the grocery store clerk. John Denver was a little underwhelmed at God showing up in his bathroom wearing a light jacket, jeans, sneakers, and a fishing cap. So he asked God/George Burns if this is what He really looked like.

And God/George Burns said, "No, but if you saw me like I really look, you couldn't handle it."

It will be a time of praise, because we'll be overwhelmed by God.

Today is All Saints Sunday or Totenfest Sunday. It is a day when we remember people who were a part of their lives. During the course of his past year, they have been mourned and they are still missed. Losing loved ones is difficult and it is painful.

Yet, we need to live and move in hope. We need to live and move with the constant assurance that God has a place for us because God loves us. We need to live and move in hope that the place God has for us will be a wonderful place that we will enjoy forever.

I say this because God is one who truly loves us.

We love imperfectly and we long what is best for our children. If, as imperfect parents we can long to spend eternity together, let us know that our Father in heaven, who is perfect, has made plans for all of us to spend eternity together--because God loves each of us too much to let us ever vanish from His sight.