

Sermon Note: Is Heaven Real?

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Introduction

As we continue our worship series *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith*, we turn to a question many of us struggle with: What happens when we die? Popular images of heaven—clouds, harps, angels in white—sometimes feel more like cartoons than images of hope. And when loss and grief hit close, when someone we love is gone, the questions become more urgent: Will I see them again? Is there something beyond this life, or is death simply the end?

This week we explore where our sacred text offers hope about life after death, and how Jesus offers hope. We know that this hope is rooted in the resurrection and that ideas of heaven are not abstract. Knowing these things is different than trusting in them. Can we believe Jesus' promise to return and take us to himself? Is that promise is enough to anchor us when grief and uncertainty press in? This week we explore these difficult questions, trusting that God sustains us in our uncertainty, our doubt, and our commitment to trust.

Illustration Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_wnD6jxREU

In this clip from *Field of Dreams* (1989), a father asks his son, "Is this heaven?" and receives a simple, profound answer.

Why This Video?

The final scene of *Field of Dreams* hinges on a simple question and an unexpected answer. The exchange between Ray and his father refuses to separate heaven from the ordinary ground we stand on. The scene holds the tension between asking whether heaven exists and seeing where it's present—in an Iowa cornfield, in the act of throwing a baseball, in the moment two people who were estranged find each other again. The clip doesn't answer every question about the afterlife. It shows what happens when a father and son who couldn't talk to each other start playing catch.

Video Discussion Questions

1. John asks, "Is this heaven?" and Ray answers, "It's Iowa." What do you make of that response? What might it suggest about where and how we encounter something beyond the ordinary?
2. The scene takes place in a cornfield, not a sanctuary. How does the setting shape the way you hear the question about where we can encounter God?
3. The moment is marked by reconciliation between a father and son who were estranged. How does the quality of a relationship shape the way you think about eternity?

4. Ray asks, "Is there a heaven?" John answers that heaven is where dreams come true, and Ray looks around at his home and his family and says, "Maybe this is heaven." What is the difference between asking whether heaven exists and recognizing it when it shows up?
5. Ray asks, "Dad, want to have a catch?" What does that simple invitation carry in this moment?
6. This brief clip doesn't show pearly gates or clouds. It shows two people playing catch. What does that simplicity reveal about what matters most to us?
7. This moment between father and son feels both ordinary and sacred. When have you experienced something similar?
8. The clip ends when Ray's wife turns on the lights so they can keep playing. How can you help others see sacred moments as they happen?

1 Timothy 2:3-6a (NRSVue)

³This is right and acceptable before God our Savior, ⁴who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God;
 there is also one mediator between God and humankind,
 Christ Jesus, himself human,
⁶ who gave himself a ransom for all

John 14:1-6 (NRSVue)

¹"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Scripture Study Questions

1. First Timothy says God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." How does this claim about God's desire shape the way you think about who is included in God's love?
2. The passage describes Jesus as "one mediator between God and humankind" and adds that he is "himself human." Why does Jesus' humanity matter when we talk about his role as mediator?
3. When Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," what do you hear—comfort, command, invitation? What would it take for you to actually let go of what troubles you?
4. Jesus tells his disciples, "In my Father's house are many dwelling places." What does that image suggest to you about the kind of room God makes for us?
5. Jesus promises, "I will come again and will take you to myself." How does that promise feel to you right now—as reassurance, as something distant, as something you struggle to trust?
6. Thomas says, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" When have you felt like Thomas, uncertain about both the destination and the path forward?
7. Jesus answers, "I am the way and the truth and the life." What difference does it make to think of Jesus as the way itself, not just the one who gives directions?

8. In John 14, Jesus offers hope grounded in relationship—"that where I am, there you may be also"—rather than a detailed map of the afterlife. What helps you trust a promise like that when so much remains unknown?
9. These passages point toward a future held by God, where Jesus is present and where there is room for us. What brings you comfort and/or peace when the world around you feels chaotic?

Weekly Action

Each day this week, notice one ordinary moment that feels special—a conversation, a meal, time with someone you love, light coming through a window, something simple that catches your eye or your breath. Pay attention to this moment and choose to be still and experience it. At the end of each day, write down what you noticed and ask yourself: Where did I see heaven today? This is less about certainty or proof and more about making a choice to recognize where God is present even in the middle of ordinary life.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you promise that where you are, we will be also. Because you live, we too will live forever. When we do not know the way forward, remind us that you are the way. Teach us to live each moment recognizing you as our eternal hope, trusting in your promise. Through Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.