

Sunday 28th September 2025: Trinity 15. Benefice Holy Communion, Oswaldkirk

“Now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.”, says Abraham to the rich man in the gospel. Where is the rich man though, and why?

At our first Alpha course on Wednesday, on the video there was a quote from the late Freddie Mercury of the rock band Queen, *“You can have everything in the world and still be the loneliest man. And that is the most bitter type of loneliness, success has brought me world idolisation and millions of pounds. But it's prevented me from having the one thing we all need: A loving, ongoing relationship.”*

Have you ever in your life rejected love offered to you from someone else? There might have been a good reason and often we look back and wonder what might have been. We are, however, made to enjoy relationships and give and receive love in all sorts of ways. Can you imagine then a life that is without love, where you have so cut yourself off from receiving it that you have imprisoned yourself in isolation, complete and utter loneliness, perhaps surrounded with possessions and accumulated wealth? Perish the thought you might think, and we would all probably agree that it would be a pretty awful way to exist.

If we imagine that on a human level, what about an eternal one? If we should reject the eternal Love of God and choose to cut ourselves off from that? It is hard to imagine rejecting pure love or being offended by the love of God. Yet, the miracles performed by Jesus in the Gospels caused two reactions; either people were overjoyed by love and mercy, or they were driven into dark bitterness and

hate for Jesus. That darkness drove an entire mob of people to shout. “Crucify Him!” - *crucify Love Himself*, to reject the Love that created the universe, that sent His Son to redeem and save. To choose that and to remain in the darkness instead has a name - Hell.

If someone chooses to be closed off to God’s love and grace, they are unlikely to decide that they want to be with God when they encounter Him fully. They may wish for the darkness and agony to cease, like the rich man in the Gospel reading, but if they do not want to know God and be in a relationship with Him, then they are simply asking for “heaven” on their own terms and such a place doesn’t exist. Jesus Christ is the mediator, the ‘Way’ that connects humanity and the whole universe to God, because He is God incarnate, and He is love. He comes to unite human nature to His own nature but does not do it by force. In that sense He acts as a dividing line; one that is so strong, so pure, that it demands a response, causing all to either move toward or to disdain because His pure love does not conform to their own desires and behaviour, where there is little or no humility, compassion, grace or concern for others, where the gifts of the Spirit are absent.

Those who have refused the love of God will experience a feeling of separation not just from God, but from love, and from all that is good and beautiful. They will dwell in darkness, and it will certainly feel to them as though they are in a completely different place than those enjoying the presence of God. That place has a name - Hell.

Regarding this, the Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware states, “*If the doors of hell are locked, then they are locked from within.*”. In other words, it is

possible that someone can be in the presence of God and still be blind to it; and that it is the choice of the person who has closed the door and locked it, and not God whose desire is to seek and save, who stands at the door and knocks and that choice truly is Hell.

The letter of James says our earthly lives are a *“mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes”*, reminding us that our earthly journey is brief. Perhaps the greatest lesson to learn from this story today, then, is that when death comes knocking on our door there is only one thing that matters: our relationship with Jesus Christ, not our possessions, riches, selfish behaviour and hate.

In his first letter, John writes, *“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life”*. Jesus presents us all with a choice, if we wish to live apart from God during our time on earth, that wish will apply for eternity as well, and that is what we call Hell.

God is loving and wants all to be saved from this and works in every person's life to bring them to at least turn toward Him in whatever way we are capable. But if we ignore Him, if we bury our treasure, that is our true self, in the ground in selfish pursuits and passions, hate the world, and our fellow human beings, when we inevitably meet Him, and we are called to account, we will have chosen not to know Him, and neither will He know us because we will have rejected His image of love He put within us and we will be disconnected from Him.

That is Hell.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

