John 14:23-39
Now and Later – Heaven on earth now

**Joke:**
I found this version of an old joke that you've probably heard before:
A man arrives at the gates of heaven. St . Peter asks, "Religion?"
The man says, "Methodist."
St. Peter looks down his list and says, "Go to Room 24, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8."

Another man arrives at the gates of heaven. "Religion? "Lutheran."
"Go to Room 18, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8."

A third man arrives at the gates. "Religion? "Presbyterian."

"Go to Room 11, but be very quiet as you pass Room 8."
The man says, "I can understand there being different rooms for different denominations, but why must I be quiet when I pass Room 8?"

St. Peter tells him, "Well, the Brethren are in Room 8, and they think they're the only ones here."
WHAT IF I SAY TO YOU THAT WE CAN BEGIN TO EXPERIENCE HEAVEN ON EARTH?

What do you think of when you think of heaven?
I know what the Bible says about heaven.
Revelations says a golden city paved with Gold streets.
Jewels filled the walls around the city, Pearls were embedded in the city’s gate.

We love reading about heaven too.
If you want some up close and personal things written about Heaven you might want to check out Amazon’ Heaven is for Real – 90 Minutes in Heaven – Proof of Heaven – The First Phone Call from Heaven – Imagine Heaven
357,000 books on Amazon that have heaven in the title or are tagged with the word

We Want in touch with that spiritual realm. Fascinated with heaven and the spiritual world it entails.
Maybe that is why we are seeing so many people on spiritual quests, joining new religious movements, buying books from the spiritual experts.
We see purchases of angels and books about angels.

Longing Home
We call heaven our home. It is known as our spiritual home ~ where we really belong.
We are sojourners or travelers. Stanley Hauerwaus calls us in a bestselling book Resident Aliens.

I think that not so much a fascination but a longing.

ILLUSTRATION: Mom
It reminds me of my mother who always wants to go back to live in her childhood town.
It is almost like a longing with her.
A place where peace resides in her heart and that she is free from the troubles and cares of this world.

Maybe heaven represents a place where we have a sense of well-being. Where living is easy and there are no problems and we feel secure. Maybe it’s a time we remember when we were children.

It is a longing that many believe that they can only find in heaven.

Maybe this unsatisfied longing is much deeper than that.

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE?

LONGING FOR DEEPER SENSE OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE OF GOD HERE ON EARTH
Maybe this longing we have is a longing for a deeper sense of the divine presence of God on this earth.
There is Good news that people need to know and understand that that Divine presence of God is here with us.
That the divine love is here;
   Loving us, within us and around us and working on our behalf.

**Images that explain this**
Divine presence that of God we call the Holy Spirit that is imaged as a river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God into all of creation.

Nothing will be accursed and light will overcome the darkness.

“I’ve got a river of life flowing out of me ~ makes the lame to walk and the blind to see, opens prison doors sets the captive free, I’ve got a river of live flowing out of me
Spring up oh well within my soul – spring up o well and make me whole
Spring up o well and give to me that life abundantly”

There is this image of a river that flows into us and it is the Holy Spirit of God.
In this Spirit heaven begins here.
We can enjoy that peace that Jesus is talking about because The Spirit of God lives in us.
You see it isn’t about heaven being a place to escape this challenging and difficult life. Heaven begins now. We get these times where this well of life rises up into us and we know this is a piece of heaven.

**Eugene Peterson puts it this way**

“Many people want to go to heaven the way they want to go to Florida— they think the weather will be an improvement and the people decent.

He goes on to say, “We enter heaven not by escaping what we don’t like, but by the sanctification of the place which God has placed us.”

Sanctification means to make holy.

Heaven begins here by not escaping but finding it in the midst of our earthly life. We find it in a life filled with love for God and the holy and for ourselves and for others. We find it in the midst of our suffering and our joy.

**Crazy Times**

This is what Jesus is talking about. It seems crazy that we can have a heaven on earth kind of life.
We can find this Holy Peace in the midst of all of the crazy stuff that is happening around us.

**People of Jesus’ time**

It was most likely written during the violent reign of either Nero (60’s) or Domitian (90’s). Both of these Roman emperors are known to have actively persecuted Christians and other groups, seeming to take their entertainment from the suffering of others. McLaren comments: *Life was always hard in the Roman empire for poor people, as it was for most of the followers of Jesus. But life was extremely precarious when the man at the helm of the empire was vicious, paranoid, and insane, as both Nero and Domitian were.* The first readers of this book faced a world situation which appeared to be terminal. They expected the end to come very soon because there was no other way out.  


**Today**

In the twenty-first century, we have become aware of looming disaster, too. This year’s terrorist attacks in Paris, then Brussels brought some people to the tipping point. The French president said, “We will lead the fight, and we will be ruthless.” The world seems to be devolving into chaos! In the past, the end of the world was considered to be in the hands of the Creator. Now it seems clear that we have the power to bring it about with
our own violence, or with our own greed for earth’s resources.

**HOW DO WE GET IT?**

You see we live in the human realm where there is pain and suffering but we live with this amazing and beautiful spirit of God inside of us.

Because of this we might feel challenged to even think we can become anything like Holy that might enable us to experience that river of live we call the Holy Spirit within our souls.

This river of the Spirit of God flows down into us bridging the gap between this world and the next.

We experience it now and later.

So if what Eugene Peterson says is true about making our lives Holy, how do we do it in all of its challenges?

How we tap into the experience of heaven here on Earth?

**Follow the Ways of Jesus and abiding in the Holy Spirit**

These are set in the time of Jesus before he is crucified.
These are his parting words – his parting teachings.

What would be your parting words to your family about life?
What legacy of life would you leave with the people who you love?
What would you say about your life and the things that your family would need to live their lives in God?
For them to have a heavenly life.
Would you tell them how to marry or what kind of work they should do?
How would you teach them how to love?
What it means to show compassion?
How do we forgive?
Don't hold a grudge
Words are always uplifting

Jesus leaves us with a life of holiness ~ a life in the Spirit of love, spirit of God.

The Message calls the spirit friend.
It is someone you can depend, rely on. Someone who will come to our defense.
It is Jesus’ whole discourse in this chapter and the Chapter is all about the Holy Spirit and the way in which she helps us in these places that seem impossible.
He talks about love, peace and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is alive in love. The Spirit comes to comfort us, stand with us, encourages our hearts, provides wisdom and strength and gifts us.

Jesus is leaving this earth but know this, He says, “God is sending my spirit to be with you and you will never be alone.

And you will be able to keep my word through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit changes our lives through following the words of Jesus.

**How do we usher in heaven on earth in our personal lives?**

The Message says when we love like this Jesus and God will move right into the neighborhood. I want my neighborhood to be made holy in love ~ I am talking about my life first.

**Illustration:**
I recently sat in a meeting with a group of colleagues and others. A question was posed that we were to comment on.
Immediately, I felt tense because what I wanted to say would bump up against some of the others. We began our discussion and the remarks stirred me more. I began to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to calm me in the midst and that I would be able to discuss my point of view with grace. I was afraid of myself in the midst of this. I was so afraid of being sharp-tongued.

It worked.

I think about the whole conversation. I realized that it was about my belief about being right. When I left that go to allow myself to proclaim my own thought, my words became palatable not only to me to others around the room.

**Tree producing fruit**
I went inside myself to that spiritual river of God flowing in me and there I found the peace I needed. That is fruit that the scripture talks about.

The Spirit will help create fruit in us. The more we allow the Spirit to flow in our lives the more we experience this peace. Fruit like kindness and gentleness ~
This is life lived in the Holy Spirit ~ this is life lived in that sanctification ~ holiness.
This is life lived in encouraged and loving hearts ~ not troubled hearts.

That is why it is important to be about the spiritual practices that we’ve been learning.

In this climate of polarization, we are blessed to have the Holy Spirit to make every conversation a place of love.

I remember someone always saying that when she went to work she would pray herself up to usher in the grace of God into a workplace where people were compete effectively every man for themselves.

The Holy Spirit brings us truth and she undergirds the teachings of Jesus.

**CLOSING:**
Like in the days of Jesus, we need that piece of heaven. Jesus peace is important for us. This beautiful God is with us and within us. That means that the beautiful realm is all about us.

**So let me ask you**

What does heaven look like to you? What longings do we have in this time in our lives?
How would living a life in the love and Jesus grace help our longings?

Heaven on earth, is it true?