

What Heaven Is

Co-missioners,

Matt Metevelis, remember? The hospice chaplain in Las Vegas with a side job at a little Lutheran congregation in the downtown area. We last heard from him directly at the beginning of September when he reviewed [N.T. Wright's book on the pandemic](#). A month later we sent you to Mockingbird for a piece he published there.

Matt stays busy on Facebook too, where he doesn't hesitate to share what's on his mind. It's almost always worth reading, especially if you think there's more to the distinction between Law and Gospel than a quaint theological construct that floats in the ether somewhere. Over the weekend we ran across a rumination he posted soon after Thanksgiving. It's an Advent-style piece, fixing the mind's eye on the great promises of God. We asked if we could share it here. "Sure," he said.

"Thank you," say we.

Peace and Joy,

The Crossings Community

What Heaven Is

by Matthew Metevelis



Then I saw a new *heaven*
and a new *earth.*

REVELATION 21:1

What happens when you die? This is a common question I get. I have cute answers that I can toss out on the fly. "I don't know, I never got a travel brochure." But today I was reflecting on end-of-life with a patient who is a pretty devout Christian. I had Genesis 1 on my mind. Before the fall God is like a really over-zealous concierge. "I'll give you plants, and beasts, and trees with seed and fruit, and fish." God just hands stuff out. God gives. The genius of the Small Catechism is that it captures this about God. What do we know about God? No attributes. No definitions. No "is there a rock God can't lift?" Nope. Just affirmations. God gives stuff. Lots of stuff. We are not told why. Luther takes it further and says that this is because this is just how good God is. He gives when we don't deserve. Much to our annoyance when we look at our neighbors. "They don't deserve it!" Yep, neither do you.

I took this theology and thought about my weekend. We did have a great thanksgiving. Watching movies as a family. Enjoying the

dog and the baby. Took some amazing walks in great weather. I had a great gyro. Marissa put the tree up after I unpacked Christmas from the garage. I got some Barnes and Noble time. The Mandalorian was sheer Star Warsy goodness. Bethany took the kids for the day and Marissa and I got some alone time. Thanksgiving tasted amazing for Marissa's first effort. I drank a bit but not too much. Finished a book I've been trying to finish for a long time. Just four joyful days.

Family, food, recreation, home, weather. All good gifts. Much thanks was given in my heart. But for all four of those days as much as I loved them I couldn't stop a tape playing in my head. "You've got to go to work on Monday. You've got to let some patients

know that you're transferring them to telehealth. Your article is due next Friday. You're on call with a funeral next Saturday. There's a sermon in December. Why did you let yourself get so fat this year? What are you going to do with your life? Look what your friends have accomplished! You're forty next year; what can you show for it? You're not going to enjoy these kids as much when they get older and want nothing to do with you. What then? Also, it's going to get super hot come May so you better enjoy these walks. You really think you'll be able to leave Christmas shopping till the last minute with COVID this year?"

That's the pull of our lives. God's gifts. Our monologue. If we can ever get our monologue to just say thank you for two seconds or for a holiday it's a major accomplishment. I'm not usually one for allegorical interpretation but I'm wondering if the serpent in the garden was just Eve's inner monologue that spent a perfect day fixated on the tree she couldn't touch. That's

THE CREED

The First Article: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean? I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, and purely out of Fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

where sin comes in. We have a parent that literally hands us the cookie jar and while we have our hands in it we wonder if there's a bigger jar out there. Or we try to convince ourselves how worthy we are of the cookie jar when the reason we have it is that we have a parent who is just a nut and loves to give us cookies for no other reason than so we can enjoy them. But we miss the fact that God just wants us to have cookies. We're blessed because God is a bit crazy like this. Somebody needs to hand God a parenting book. You spoil kids like this. Create...give...create... give...

(And because we're much too dense to get the point any other way God just got sick of it and gave us Godself on a cross—the place where we recognize him least and need him most. See how crazy God is?)

So here's my proposal for what heaven is like. The tape just gets turned off. The file is erased. The part of us that measures, analyzes, judges, rates, compares, quantifies, dreads, fears, and doubts just drops off. We don't even remember what it was like to use it. We just get blessings and receive them as blessings. We enjoy people for who they are and not what they "mean" to us. We do things with and for them for the joy of it without having to prove anything to the world or ourselves. We just take good things because they're good without thinking twice. We become like how your dog is when you offer a table scrap, or how my ten-month-old is when you offer him something even remotely shiny and interesting. Just abundant giving and joyful reception. Just good posts with the commenting turned off by the group administrator. We finally shut up. We effortlessly sink into the "this is very good" of the seventh day and leave it at that.

Fancy theological types might call this "a return to original creation." Better ones would opine about Christ being the end of

the law.

But I would just call it heaven.

Amen.