

The McGillicuttys in Heaven (part 1)
November 8, 2015 (Revelation 21:1-4; Mark 12:41-44)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "**Behold, the dwelling place of God is with humans. God will dwell with them, and they will be God's people, and God himself will be with them as their God.**"

⁴¹ And [Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "**Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.**"

All four McGillicuttys walk into sanctuary from side chapel.

- **Homer, the father**, a sedate university professor, who talks as though words cost \$100 each.
- **Gretchen, the mother** who is sweet and kindly, the type that everyone would expect to go to heaven.
- **Lisa, the daughter**, twelve years old, formerly spoiled child, who is approaching her teenage years, and trying to discover who she is.
- **Ralph (aka Ralphie, a name he despises) the teenage son** who knows more than everyone in the world and who wants to have a good time, and who no one would be too surprised if he "didn't quite make the cut" to go to heaven.
- **DEEP - VERY DEEP -- VOICE FROM OFF STAGE**: Guess who.
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Dad McGillicutty: Oh my God! Would you look at this?!

Mom McGillicutty: I've never been into the Emergency Room before. I had no idea it looked like this.

Son McGillicutty: Mooooooooom! (in an imitation of Jane Brown's voice in that unique way she says her saintly husband's name) It's NOT the Emergency Room. Did you really think that when that tractor-trailer ran over all four of us as we were crossing the street from the Dainty Doughnuts Shop that we would be going to the hospital.

Daughter McGillicutty: Ralphie, are you saying that we are ...?

Son McGillicutty: Dead, Lisa? Am I saying we are dead? Yes, we are dead. Dead as a door nail. Dead. Dead. Dead. “Do not pass ‘Go.’ Do not collect \$200. D-E-A-D.”

Mom McGillicutty: Is that so, Homer? Is Ralphie right?

Dad McGillicutty: Might be. Doesn’t look like the hospital. Look at these folks around us. Haven’t seen any of them recently in church recently. I wonder who’s in charge.

DEEP - VERY DEEP -- VOICE FROM OFF STAGE: Are you looking for me?

Mom McGillicutty: (jumping at the sound of that voice, as though very frightened by it) Oh, my God! Holy Cow!

DEEP - VERY DEEP -- VOICE FROM OFF STAGE: Yes?

Son McGillicutty: You might want to back off a little bit, Mom. If he is who you said said he is, you might want to – uh! you know – show a little respect, and back off on the Hindu cattle talk, OK? You know until we get this all sorted out.

DEEP - VERY DEEP -- VOICE FROM OFF STAGE: It’s OK, Gretchen. You were right on the first guess. And, it’s alright Ralph, I’m pretty fond of the cattle, too.

Daughter McGillicutty: [sniffing or crying, but trying not to.] Uh, if you’re God, then does that mean we really are dead? And this is not one of those ER bright light experiences. And if we’re really dead, are we in heaven? Cause I see Harold Slate over there and I know he went to heaven. And if we’re in heaven, how come we can’t see you?

DEEP - VERY DEEP -- VOICE FROM OFF STAGE: Slow down, Lisa. Slow down. Yes, you did pass through that one-way door that my children call “death.” And yes, you are in heaven. I know you’re not surprised to see Harold here, but as you look around some of these folks might surprise you.

Son McGillicutty: [interrupting] Boy, you got that one right. I thought for sure that that old guy over there would *never* get here. He was soooooo crabby! [catching himself for interrupting] Oh! Sorry to interrupt, God. It’s kind of a bad habit I have.

DEEP - VERY DEEP -- VOICE FROM OFF STAGE: It's OK, Ralph. I'm kind of used to ALL of your habits.

Anyway, to continue, Lisa: ... the reason you can't see me is that I'm just phoning in from earth. That's where I live, you know. I just wanted to welcome the four of you. My associate, Mr. Rock will be giving you an orientation. I'll be dropping in every now and again, and we can chat more later. ... if you'd like to talk.

Mom McGillicutty: "If we'd like to?" Who wouldn't want to talk to You, God. You have the answers to all the questions of the universe. ... [pause] And what do you mean, You don't live here? I thought You said we are in heaven?

DEEP - VERY DEEP -- VOICE FROM OFF STAGE: Well, Gretchen. I'm just saying.... Some people never seemed to have much interest in talking to me before they crossed through that doorway called "death." What makes you think that they are more interested in doing so now? And yes, this IS heaven. But, as my boy Jesus tried to teach folks when he walked among you, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." I spend most of my time on the other side of that doorway among the living. I'm the only one who can use it as a two-way door.

But hey! We will have plenty of time to talk more later. Lots and lots and lots of time. Make yourself at home. I'm going to check in to see what my servant Monty is telling his flock. We'll talk more later.

Today is the first in a three part sermon series about the McGillicutty Family in heaven. The Worship Committee came up with this series to deal with the Topic: The Kingdom of Heaven – for the three worship services after ALL SAINTS SUNDAY, whose banners are still up for this last Sunday) through the last Sunday of the liturgical year before we start all over (on November 29) with Advent, the beginning of the new liturgical year. That last Sunday is CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY – the culmination of the whole church year.

And that is the culmination of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany Lent, Easter, Pentecost – because all of Jesus' life and ministry can be

summed up in the first sermon he preached: **REPENT THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND.**

We – like the McGillicuttys did – sometimes think that HEAVEN is only on the other side of the doorway called death. But Jesus said **THE KINGDOM IS AT HAND. Right here. Right now. IF we will but pay attention to its presence.**

The McGillicuttys got a surprise this first week, when they arrived at the pearly gates and realized that the scripture (we used for a call to worship) which they so often hear at funerals – REALLY IS TRUE. The home of God is among people – right here.

(Careful students of the Bible got their first clue of that in the First Testament, when Jacob had the dream in which he saw the angels on the ladder that stretched all the way to heaven from earth. When you read it carefully you see that the angels were not coming down to earth from heaven and then going back up. Rather, they were going UP from earth to heaven and then coming back down.)

Anyway, the McGillicuttys got their first surprise when they found that God was not hanging out at the Pearly Gates, waiting for them. Rather, God’s home is among people ON THE EARTH.

We’ll find out more of their surprises in the next two weeks – all of which is based on what scripture tells us, but which so many people have missed, because they grew up hearing fairy tales that aren’t based on scripture.

Let me share another story with you – one which you may find familiar, but with a little twist:

The Master sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And the Master called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their

abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

When they came out of the Temple, the disciple whose name in Greek means “The Rock” but whose name in Aramaic is closer to “Blockhead” said to him: “Master you told us about the one poor widow, but I saw another widow, also quite poor, and she put in her last two copper coins as well. Why didn’t you talk to us about her?”

“Oh, you mean why did I point out Matilda, but did not mention Brunhilde?” said the Master.

“Yeah, well, whatever their names; I don’t know all the poor widows as well as you, apparently. But, yes, why did you just lift up the one as an example, but not the other.”

“Because I did not want you to be confused,” said the Master. “You see, both Matilda and Brunhilde gave a like amount, out of their like poverty. But Brunhilde went around telling everyone about what she had done, showing her devotion to duty – very much like the rich people did – looking for pats on the back. Matilda, on the other hand, did not give out of duty; she gave out of joy. See the difference?”

The thick as a rock disciple scratched his head, and said, “Huh?”

The Master told him, “You see Brunhilde gave until it hurt. Someone told her that God likes that kind of sacrificial giving. Matilda gave until it felt good. Someone told her – RIGHTLY – that when you give through it hurting, all the way until it feels good, that this is when you really begin to experience the Kingdom of Heaven. Get it?”

The disciple scratched his head again, and said that he got it, but he Master was not totally convinced.

It’s an important distinction to “give until it hurts” or to “give until it feels good.”

Let me illustrate this important **Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand principle** with something that we did in worship today. The Stewardship Committee asked you (after giving you notice three weeks ago that it was coming) to give an accounting of your membership vows stewardship for the past few weeks.

You were asked to give your best estimate of how much you invested in your prayer -time, your satisfaction with your financial giving, your service-time, your presence-time, and your witness-time.

There were some people who resented this. Even though no name was asked for in this stewardship accountability – the only person who would know your own tally sheet is you – some people resented it ...

because it invaded their privacy, or because it made them feel bad, or I don't know why – and perhaps they didn't either. And some people expressed their displeasure by simply not doing it.

I don't know their reasons for resenting it – but I think it was all about BRUNHILDE kind of thinking – i.e. someone's trying to put some guilt trip on my for not doing enough. I didn't give until it hurts.

In actuality, the Matilda thinking with this exercise – the way of thinking that gives until it feels good – allows the person to think back over all that they have done in different ways for the Kingdom of God, and they feel good about it.

You see – when you give past the “give until it hurts” – whether it's your time, talent, gifts, presence, prayers, and witness – then it feels very good to do it. There is not one ounce of guilt involved.

This GIVING as set forth in membership vows, is all about getting your life aligned ... getting your priorities in order ... in living the way life is meant to be lived in the Kingdom.

If folks aren't on board with living by Kingdom of Heaven principles while they are walking on earth, then what makes them think they will be happy on the other side of death Kingdom of Heaven. They won't enjoy it any better there than they do here.

Here's another way of looking at things like Matilda instead of Brunhilde: (this was Saint Paul's description in Galatians 5:22-23):

This person's giving results in: **“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”**

If your looking back over the exercise of filling out your remembrance of how you lived the God-prescription for a good life and it makes you resentful, then it's Brunhilde thinking. You're locked into the “living up to expectations” way of thinking.

If your looking back over the exercise of filling out your remembrance of how you lived the God-prescription for a good life and it gives you a feeling of **“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”** then you’re thinking like a Matilda.

And here’s the real kicker: life is going to kick you in the teeth at times. Brunhilde-thinkers will get angry and think they have been dealt a raw deal. They will feel like life is not fair; God is not loving; and they are going to be generally grumpy.

When life kicks Matilda’s in the teeth, after they have learned the find attitudes of **“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”** – largely by giving until it feels good – then they are going to grit their teeth, and get through it knowing – in their heart, not just their head – **that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God’s purpose** (Romans 8:28)

Here’s the good news: every Brunhilde can become a Matilda – IF THEY CHOOSE. God never forces us to quit being stingy or resentful. God’s good life – Kingdom of Heaven life here at hand – only comes for those who choose it voluntarily. It begins with being thankful, and giving until it feels good – for your own sake.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
AMEN.