

"The Sky's the Limit"

Text: 2 Peter 3:8-14

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Dear Fellow Servants of the One True God:

The English language is full of expressions that no longer even mean anything, except what we all have sort of agreed that they mean. Who knows, for example, what "dead ringer" first meant – or, for that matter, any of the following: "bought the farm," "heard it on the grapevine," "as neat as a pin," "catch some z's," "shoot the bull," "the cat's pajamas," "caught red-handed," "kick the bucket," "pig in a poke," "raining cats and dogs," "vent your spleen," and so on. All of these might actually have made sense at one time; now they mean only what we all agree they mean – or whatever the spam in my inbox claims as their original meaning.

So it is this morning that we are going to perpetuate the nonsense a bit by taking a look at another more or less meaningless expression, only this time we will do our best to pump some substantial meaning back into this rather strange grouping of words. The expression is – as the sermon title indicates – "the sky's the limit," and the text that will form the basis for our study this morning is found in Peter's Second Epistle, the Third Chapter:

ESV 2 Peter 3:8-14 **"But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ ¶ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ ¶ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace."**

This is God's Word. We highly value these words for in them we are taught the wisdom of God himself, recognizing that they are, in fact, *his* words. Seeking the wisdom, strength and comfort that our God would give us through our study of these words also this morning, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

"The sky's the limit" really has no literal meaning today, does it? Limit for what? The sky is no longer the limit for much of anything. Building? We not only have skyscrapers, there are human beings living in a space station about 250 miles above the earth's surface. Travel? We now travel not only *in* the sky but *above* it – in space. Obviously we *use* the expression to mean "limitless" – as in, "When it comes to the government spending taxpayer money, the sky's the limit."

The expression popped unbidden into my head when I read about yet another attack on the doctrines or teachings of the Christian faith. This particular article claimed that the Apostle Paul was actually a spy for the Roman Government. In other words, Paul suffered shipwreck, beatings, whippings, stoning, untold hardship and depravation, hunger, cold, two imprisonments and eventually death all in devoted service not to his Savior Jesus, but to the universally beloved Roman Government. All this he did just to keep an eye on that great and menacing threat to civilized man, the tiny, fledgling Christian Church. That also would mean that even though through his life's work and preaching dozens of *Christian* congregations were started throughout the Roman Empire and countless thousands of souls were brought to faith in Jesus Christ and untold millions more converted in future generations as a result of his inspired writings, it was all just one big con to keep tabs on what Rome considered a potentially subversive threat. You bet.

That would be roughly akin to claiming that we have sent our missionaries into foreign fields to keep tabs on the impoverished souls that we fear could one day rise up to take over the world.

"The sky's the limit" applies to this sort of stuff, doesn't it. Where will it end? What part of God's Word is in any way off-limits to ridicule and attack? The answer, of course, is that not one single truth of God's Word is immune – this despite the fact that the Bible critics are always eventually proved wrong. I remember as a kid, for example, hearing the wise and learned of the world of that day postulating that their extensive and erudite research had uncovered the fact that there really never was anyone named Jesus of Nazareth. He never existed. The

whole idea was, according to their research, a fabrication of some power-hungry zealots during the Dark Ages who manufactured Jesus both to control the masses and to solidify their own positions of influence and wealth.

Today, of course, the wise and learned are, well, wiser and more learned. All admit that a man named Jesus *did* exist, but *new* evidence has somehow revealed to them that he was secretly married to Mary Magdalene and that he really intended for *her* to serve as the head of the Church after his death and that Judas was in reality the ultimate insider and Jesus' closest confidant.

Sky's the limit, indeed. While earth remains, there *is* no limit. There will be no end. Sinful mankind will always ridicule the most sacred truths of the Christian faith.

Yet in another sense there is a limit, isn't there? There *is* an end in sight, and that limit is the Day of Judgment described in our text for this morning. In the case of Judgment Day, the sky that really is the limit is that sky described by Paul in his inspired words in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 concerning the end of the world: ***"For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (sky), and so we will always be with the Lord."***

There's a reason Paul ended that section as he did: ***"Therefore encourage one another with these words."*** In fact that's where "the sky's the limit" really does mean what it says. That's when and where the ridicule and silliness will finally end. That's when the foolish and blasphemous tongues will finally stop spitting out nonsense – when our Lord finally returns, raises the dead, and calls all believers to his side at his coming. The Holy Spirit through Paul also wrote this about that day of Judgment: ***"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*** (Philippians 2:9-11)

One day the mouths that shout obscenities will be silenced. One day the godless will be *forced* to admit how foolish they have been – *forced*

because the obvious proof will be standing right there in front of them. One day all lying, all falsehood, will cease – by the command of Almighty God. Every single human being will have no choice but to acknowledge the truth that Jesus Christ is who he said he was: the Son of God and Savior of mankind. All will therefore have no choice but to give glory to the One True God in heaven. On the day that our Savior returns – ***on the clouds with power and great glory*** – *that* rarified sky, filled with the Savior's presence and his glory, *that's* the sky where our God will have established his limit. There is where the nonsense will all finally end, and all that will remain is absolute certain truth.

Think of that place and that moment, and of that one aspect or characteristic of that moment. Think of what a blessing just to be rid of all deceit, all pretense, all treachery. Imagine an existence where nothing is ever heard or spoken but that which is true and noble and edifying. No longer will any human being be able to deceive or manipulate. No longer will anyone be able to lay claim to the power or glory or goodness that belong to God alone. Gone forever will be all false pride, all arrogance, all condescension and subtle manipulation. In fact our inadequate human minds simply cannot fathom the excellence of an eternal existence where the holy Creator of heaven and earth makes his home with man and therefore also all that is false has been eternally banished.

Obviously caution will be required until that great day. The Holy Spirit in our text described those final, end times with these dramatic words: ***"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!"*** Understand that man is not able to imagine that which is actually beyond his ability to comprehend. In other words, although we know that heaven will be absolutely perfect in every way, we really have no ability to accurately conceptualize it. Our God therefore communicates with us on that basis, even while he warns us of our terrible power to throw it all away.

As the New Covenant established by Jesus is radically different from the Old Covenant, so also the new heavens and new earth will also be

nothing like the old. They will be *new* in the sense of the new man created in us at conversion – which is nothing like the old: 2 Corinthians 5:17

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

You and I will be allowed to share in that ***"new heaven and new earth"*** only because of what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us and in us. Our eternal existence will far exceed even our wildest expectations, and it is ours only because Jesus freely supplied what you and I never could provide – the full, complete, God-satisfying payment for every single one of our innumerable sins. The season of Advent excites us because it reminds us to look ahead to that coming of our Lord and the life that awaits us, and to do so on the basis of our confidence not in our own goodness but in the perfection and love of our Savior Jesus. This is such a comfort because the success of God's plan does not depend on us but on the accomplished fact of Jesus Christ. Christianity proclaims a "done deal" where Jesus Christ has already supplied all that man lacked or owed.

Can you and I even imagine such a place? We cannot. But it certainly is thrilling to contemplate where we *were* headed because of our sin, and what we *will now inherit* – our final destination – through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Take some time to contemplate such things during this Advent season. The "upside" is incredible. The sky's the limit. Amen.

ESV **Isaiah 40:1-11** Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶ A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. ⁹ Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

ESV **Mark 1:1-8** The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, ³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" ⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

ESV **2 Peter 3:8-14** But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ ¶ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ ¶ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.



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The Second Sunday in Advent – December 10, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 65 (Stanzas 1-2, 4-5) *(Red Hymnal)*
"When Sinners See Their Lost Condition"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. *(Brown Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 40:1-11) How God longed to be able to speak words of peace and comfort to Israel. He could not because of their ongoing sin, rebellion, and idolatry. Still God held out hope to those who looked forward to the fulfillment of the Promised Messiah. We today read these words with the knowledge that they have found their fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. With the gift of his Son, God has comforted his people.

Psalms 85 (Supplement page 40)

The Gospel Lesson: (Mark 1:1-8) As we again commemorate the coming of Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of God's Messianic prophecy, we also are reminded of the Great Forerunner, John the Baptist. We remember this great servant as perhaps the greatest example of how human beings are called, not to draw attention to themselves, but to reflect the honor and glory of our God. John the Baptist is held in such high regard by us, in part, because he did this just about as well as any human being could.

The Confession of Faith -

Nicene Creed – *(Supplement page 5)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 72 *(Red Hymnal)*
"Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers"

The Sermon – 2 Peter 3:8-14 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*
"The Sky's the Limit"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 315 (Stanzas 1-3) *(Red Hymnal)*
"I Come, O Savior, to Thy Table"

The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Brown Hymnal page 17)*

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Brown Hymnal page 20)*

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 50 *(Red Hymnal)*
"Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (28) Average (43) Wednesday (17)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship Meal
	-12:00 p.m.	– Annual Voters and WF meetings
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Advent Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Christmas Eve Rehearsal
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Michael Wilke is considering calls to the newly formed dual parish of Calvary of Marquette and St. Peter's of Iron River. Pastor David Pfeiffer is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato.

Church Council Notes – The Council met Monday, December 4, all members present. Allison Schaller was accepted into communicant membership by transfer from Messiah of Eau Claire. Offerings and expenses for November were both over budget. The General Fund has a positive balance YTD. The Council positions of Keith Mantz and Gary Miller expire at year's end, as does Gary Miller's Board of Elders position. The Christmas week schedule was set as 12/24 regular Sunday service at 10am, Children's Christmas Eve service at 5pm, and Christmas Day service at 10am. The 2024 Budget that will be presented to the Voters calls for a 3.5% increase.

Final Advent Service – The last of our three Midweek Advent services is scheduled for this Wednesday at 7pm.

Annual Voters and WF Meeting – Both the Annual Voters and Women's Fellowship meetings are scheduled for this morning, following our traditional fellowship meal. All are encouraged to participate.