Good morning!

We have had a bit of a detour the last two weeks because we were attending to the business of confirming our eighth-grade students. They have entered into the realm of full fledged membership here and we continue to celebrate that milestone with them.

 For today however, I want to bring us back to dirt. Now we have been talking about dirt, about being grounded, for a long time…since Christmas in fact. But today we are going to raise our sights just a bit as we think about heaven…dirty heaven. Now I know that sounds like an oxymoron at first. Heaven is a perfect, pure, Clorox bleached place right?

Maybe not so much. If we want to understand heaven, we need only to look to Jesus. Jesus was perfect. Does that mean his teeth were brilliant and straight? Did he have unblemished skin? Does it mean that he never stubbed his toe on a saw horse? Does it mean that Jesus never missed and hit his thumb with a hammer? No. Perfection means that Jesus never sinned. The normal foibles and miscalculations we make every day may be imperfections, but they are of no concern to God, these do not affect our purity before him. So the image of the white clouds and flowing robes and tiny harps where we sing Holy Holy Holy incessantly might be perfect in many ways, but let’s be honest…it’s boring.

For instance, take a look at this picture. This is a shot of my wife and kids that was taken on Mother’s Day weekend down at Minihaha Falls. Now if I was a photographer, I would have to adjust for the lighting and make sure everyone was looking at the camera. But this “imperfect” picture shows an actual moment in time, it shows the personality of Ezra and demonstrates the love shared. This pictures proves to me that perfection is perfectly boring. God is not boring. God is creative! Take a walk outside, look at a garden, go on a fishing trip, take a look into the sky. All that you see was wrought in the mind of a creative madman genius! God is eccentric in his creativity. He knows no bounds! Anyone who has created anything, be it a novel, a piece of furniture, a painting, a song, a beautiful quilt, a piece of machinery, knows that it is not going to turn out right the first time. Creativity might come easily to some, but the output takes some time and practice to hone our skills in order to produce something really great. We cannot be great right out of the gate. Why? Because we are imperfect. On the other hand, God can say, “Let there be light” and boom, the switch is on and the universe in enveloped in brilliant and beautiful light. So God alone can get this creativity thing right the first time, and yet in our struggle to create, there are many beautiful messes along the way. And isn’t God pleased to see us, those created in his image, putting our skills and our brains and our time into creating! I feel a unique sense of pride when my son for instance picks up his guitar and plays a song he made up. It’s not the greatest song ever, the melody needs a little work and he might want to augment some of the chords, but yet it is those imperfections that make the song something truly wonderful. And I can sense that my pride in my son is the same sort of pride God feels towards us.

All that is to say, heaven will be a place of creativity, an everlasting workshop, where the supplies are plentiful and the inspiration flows freely, a place where mistakes and imperfections are welcome but where sin and selfishness are not.

So I can see how, if you are the creative type, that part of the sermon spoke to you. But maybe you are not so inclined and maybe you are more of a straightforward thinker, who likes everything laid out just right. Well have no fear, because heaven will be perfectly ordered and maintained and will meet our every need for safety and security. Maybe all you logical thinkers are wondering, “Well where does he fins all that in Scripture?” Fair question. Genesis 2:5 “there was no man to work the ground.” Part of our reason for being is to work! And work should be meaningful. Work creates something! Our call to work does not end when we die. So heaven is dirty in that sense…it is going to be a mess of creativity and hard work, where we are able to worship the Lord forever through our gifts and talents.

There is another way in which heaven is dirty…and again, we need to start with Jesus. And to do that we need to take a look at Christmas.

God the Father, creator send his son Jesus, the Savior of this world. But Jesus was not a cosmic force sent to earth, he was not some sort of alien presence. The Bible says he humbled himself, he became a servant…he became human. Jesus was not beamed down from somewhere in space, he was born of Mary. Divinity became a carbon-based lifeform at Christmas…Jesus became dirt. Talk about a step down. SO Jesus walks this earth he grows up, he performs miracles and is eventually killed on a cross. But the whole point here is the Jesus is not just a man…he is also God! Not God in a man suit, not God in some sort of disguise, but he is both fully God and fully man…we know this because he rose from the dead. Happy Easter! He has risen! But now comes the tricky part…after he rose, he did another amazing thing that we call the ascension. Jesus literally flew into the air and out of sight. Where did he go? Where is Jesus? The creed proclaims that he sits at the right hand of God the Father. But where? Well, the Bible is not so clear on that point, but we can say that Scripture understands heaven to be an actual place. It is not strictly spiritual because Jesus exists in bodily form right now in heaven. We tend to think of heaven as above, somewhere beyond our orbit so to speak, we don’t know where…it’s frankly none of our business. But when Jesus ascended into the air, he did not somehow dissipate into trillions of molecules…He remained as he was…a man, made of dirt, marked by the wounds with which he saved us…All of this makes for a Dirty heaven. I get the sense that wherever Jesus is now, he looks at his hands and remembers the pain of death as well as the love that put him there. I imagine he turns to his Father and asks excitedly,” Can I go now? Is it time?” And God the Father smiles and shakes his head…Not yet…not yet. And so we wait, with Jesus we wait for the time the Father has appointed.

 Jesus’ physical presence in heaven is not a new thing. The Bible speaks of others who have been caught up and taken away. In Genesis 5 Enoch, a great, great, great, great, great ,great grandson of Adam who was taken by God, he never died! Why? Because he pleased God…he walked faithfully with God. And it was God’s good pleasure to take him in such a way. In 2 Kings chapter 2 Elijah was famously taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. Why? Well, Elijah was known to be a powerful prophet of God who lived obediently to God’s Spirit. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul says he knew a guy who was “caught up” into heaven…a man who Paul said he would boast about, because he lived so faithfully to the Lord. And we already know that God was perfectly pleased in Jesus and guess who is next on the list? You and me. Yes heaven will be dirty, because heaven will filled with flesh and blood people, equipped with new perfected bodies. We are not talking about friendly ghosts floating around, no! Heaven is grounded! I Corinthians tells us in chapter 15:42-44 READ  And so our earthly bodies are characterized by mortality, weakness and decay. But in heaven we will be given incorruptible bodies characterized by life and strength.

Heaven will also be dirty with dirt. We will experience heaven as the new heavens and the new earth! The beauty of the earth begins in the dirt. So, in heaven, we will have new dirt, perfected dirt it you will, but dirt nonetheless. And from this dirt will grow perfected plants and sprawling greenery. And so our everlasting end looks a lot like how it all began: with a garden.

Gen. 3 gives us a glimpse of the relationship Adam and Eve enjoyed with God. Verse 8 implies that God walked with these people he created. It says “The man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day…” Can you imagine such an intimate relationship with God? Hanging out in the garden like the best of friends. I wonder what they talked about? It was probably the type of relationship in which you do not have to say much of anything. How many of us relate to God like that? How many of us can walk with him in the cool of the day? We can you know. God has come to us, he dwells within us. He is never far away, but we are so distracted. We are so noisy. We are pretty good at coming to him with a long list of requests and wishes and desires, but what if we actually spent time with him in the silence? What if we let out words be few? Maybe you have tried that type of prayer before and it didn’t seem to do much for you. Maybe it is a brand new idea to you. Whatever the case, I am telling you, this heavenly relationship with God is possible to have here and now on this earth in this place at this time. We can stop just doing things for God and actually be with God too.

 We as a church want to help make this happen for you. We want to come into God;’s presence on purpose for no purpose at all. Just to be with our creator, to take a stroll with him and to let him speak to us for a change. Doesn’t that sounds like heaven? If you are just a little excited about that prospect, if you crack a little smile at the thought of heaven, if your heart beats a little faster at the idea that we are not just waiting around to die in order to be with God then I want to cordially invite you and encourage you to come back here tonight. Come back to Lifeline. We are going to meet upstairs, sing a few songs, pray a few prayers and waste time with God. It is our deepest calling and so often the hardest one for us to attain. So come tonight…you can sing or nor sing, pray or not pray, stand sit lay down, jump around…there are no expectations, just bring your heart and come walk with God in the cool of the day.

 Heaven is a real place, it is a place of physicality, of creativity, of joy and beauty and it is a place of dirt. Heaven is where God is, heaven is where we want to be, and though most of us will not be miraculously taken away to our heavenly home before death, we can still meet with God here and now.

Revelation, which is our best resource on heaven, begins with sort of scorecard. Jesus is reviewing seven different churches and he lays out what is good about them and what is lacking. Our church just had a similar experience, except Jesus did not come down and review, a team of consultants did, but we do believe that through that process the Holy Spirit was present in our review. We found many strengths…we are doing many of the right things! We have a lot of offer our community! But, there is always a but, no church is perfect. We need to evaluate some of our weaknesses as well. As one of our leaders has pointed out, Jesus says in Revelation to the church in Ephesus: “I know your deeds, your hard work and perseverance…you have not grown weary…yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Repent!” Repent? Repent from doing good deeds and working hard? “Repent,” he says, “and do the things you did at first.” First thing’s first. Are we in love with God? And if we answer yes, then we ask, Are we madly in love with God?