

Shame and everlasting contempt

By [Steve Pankey](#)

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On August 1, 2009, *The Mobile Press-Register* published an article written by Greg Garrison of the Religion News Service entitled, "[Heaven? Sure. Hell? Not so much.](#)" Shortly thereafter, a parishioner of ours brought in a copy for me and wondered aloud, "Why don't we talk about hell any more?" It just so happened that the answer to his question appeared in the teaser quote right at the top of the article:

"When you're trying to market Jesus, sometimes there's a tendency to mute traditional Christian symbols. Difficult doctrines are left by the wayside. Hell is a morally repugnant doctrine. People wonder why God would send people to eternal punishment." - The Rev. Fred Johns, pastor of Brookview Wesleyan Church in Irondale, Ala.

I took that parishioners challenge to heart, and have kept the article tucked safely in my top left desk drawer since that day. In fact, I think of it often. This week, I've pulled it out to reread it as I'm faced with preaching a seriously difficult set of apocalyptic [lessons](#) for the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Here at Saint Paul's, we're using Track 2 of the RCL, so our lessons include:

- Daniel 12:1-3 - "There will be at time of anguish..."
- Psalm 16 - "My heart therefore is glad and my body shall rest in hope..."
- Hebrews 10:selected verses - "his enemies are made a footstool..."
- Mark 13:1-8 - the opening verses of Mark's Little Apocalypse

I dug out the Garrison article today as I've been drawn to that peculiar language of Daniel in regards to the final judgement. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." I think we all have an idea of what "everlasting life" looks like, but the alternative isn't what conventional wisdom would expect. Instead of fire, hell, and damnation, Daniel speaks of "shame and everlasting contempt." The JPS, a Hebrew translation captures the idea a little more literally, "And many of them that sleep in

the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence.”

Reproaches and everlasting abhorrence.

I honestly think that God’s everlasting abhorrence is infinitely more frightening than fire and brimstone. In fact, I find myself even agreeing (you should probably see if hell has frozen over) with Pope John Paul II, who is mentioned in the Garrison article as ‘stirring up debate in 1999 by describing hell as ‘the sate of those who freely and definitely separate themselves from God, the source of all life and joy.’”

Perhaps the good Pontiff had Daniel’s 12th chapter in mind as he spoke.

I might not take Garrison’s advice and preach hell this Sunday, but I’ve spent 450 words on the topic already. After all, Kurt Selles, director of the Global Center at Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School, is right when he says, “[hell] needs to be preached. It’s part of the Gospel.” I just find the fact that “by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14) to be infinitely more compelling.

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