

Sermon: The Joy of Life after Death!
Pastor Barnes July 12, 2020
Romans 8:1-11

May God's peace, grace and eternal love be yours as we make our way into each day - unknown, yet and eternal promise that is ours.

2 verses from Romans....

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

I got a call about a week and a half ago that mom, 92, in the latter stages of Alzheimer's disease, was no longer eating. The nurse tried to re-assure me that it could just be a time mom was going through. Been in ministry too long. You begin to have a sense of these things. But I said, okay, let's see where this goes.

Monday July 6, of this past week, Trish the head of nursing at LHV called: mom is still not eating. We think it might be a good thing to involve Hospice. Now the mind shifts. Call my brother, bring him up to speed, in Texas, you know. Remember the funeral home in Joliet from which my dad was buried. Find the box with the important papers.

How do you feel? What? How do you feel? (that's me talking to myself)

How do I feel?! Hmmm.

In my profession, I have seen more death than I remember. I profess the promise of faith from the pulpit at many, many funerals. Try to bring comfort knowing that the Cross of Christ says there is life when life here is done - the empty tomb.

How do I feel? Not so bad, I guess.

You can't go backwards! Many memories. Many lessons given in love. Many examples of God's Word brought to life in both my mom and dad. A promise that does not exclude death, but overcomes the eternal finality of death.

Does it hurt? Of course, it does. We are human created in the same love that God gave to the World. The Serpent tried to dupe Adam and Eve into in the Garden. Remember? - well, if you eat of this fruit, you can be just like God. Knowing good and evil, but also cheating death.

There is only one eternal being. Even Jesus had to become obedient, obedient even unto death and death upon a cross.

Look at all the commercials trying to eat again the fruit from the tree! A lotion that will remove wrinkles. A pill that will improve the brain. Things that will improve whatever it is that we are losing because of age. Diseases that might be cured or prolong life, good things. But in the end, only temporal things.

Don't get me wrong I'm happy for my mom. I believe we have been set free and will be raised with Christ. This sermon is not meant to be demoralizing. On the contrary. It is a reality check of what we believe. That even for me, when pretending no longer works, the promise is what you cling to. When the joy of how things journeyed with family and friends is done, you rejoice in the victory over the grave.

Did you listen to Psalm 65? Vss. 1-4 *You are to be praised, O God, in Zion; to you shall vows be fulfilled. To you, the one who answers prayer, To you all flesh shall come. Our sins are stronger than we are, But you blot out our transgressions. Happy are they whom you choose and draw to your courts to dwell there!*

My mother has been watered by the Word.

You and I have been watered by the Word. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty. We have God's Word. Water or Seed. We grow and give. We plant and plow the field to scatter.

Jesus has gone to prepare that dwelling place that Psalm 65 speaks of. A place where "all things will be made new."

Did you notice in the parable of the Sower and the Seed in our Gospel? What were the challenges for the Word/seed?

1. Understanding the word...that it can be snatched away with no depth to cling to.
2. The rocky ground of troubles...joy only till the morning does not work in the world we live.
3. Thorns of prickly pursuits of this world...in the end, yields nothing.

My mom is dying, as is the way of all living things, except that we are created in God's image - the same image as Jesus. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty. Simply put, it isn't the amount, but the blessings shared from the fruit of the seed. Those are the memories that will make me smile and feel good.

Listen to a little of Psalm 42:1-5:

Longing for God and His Help in Distress

¹As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.

²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?

³My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

⁴These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

Besides all the memories of life and family, God will hug my mom into eternal life. I like to think of the beginning of Psalm 42:

"As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God." My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

The living God! The God who waters the earth with His Word. And it will NOT come back to Him empty.

Isn't that what the Sower wanted and wants all along? That is why the Sower is such an extravagant and some would say "careless" seed sower. Never careless, for the value in the Word is always more than can be imagined.

Do you remember the song by Mercy Me - "I Can only Imagine" It is the hope, dream and promise when the seed takes hold and eternity is the place that Jesus goes to prepare. Without resurrection hope, one is forced to concede what one author wrote: "the meaning of life is that it stops." Christians know not only the truth that life is terminal, that it stops, but that even mortal life can have meaning because our life with God is not over and done with until God says it's over.

The Christian faith has its origins in a cemetery and a jolt of God's surprise move, the resurrection of the body of crucified Jesus. The church originates in the shock of Jesus Christ returning to the same disciples who deserted him and fled into the darkness. They left Jesus' body at what they thought was the ending; He returned to them that they might begin again and become his body in motion.....the church!

Our hope is that Jesus Christ is not only raised to everlasting life, but, in an amazing act of love, reaches out to us in our mortality and talks us along for the ride. “Eternal life” means being welcomed by God into God’s existence. Taking our place in God’s reign, and adopted into the Communion of Saints.

Hear this clearly: This enlistment into God’s story begins whenever we join in God’s work in the world. Our days with God in this life are a foretaste of our end. That’s why the Water/Snow the Word will accomplish that which God’s purposes. That’s why the Sower, sows extravagantly. There is no tragedy so terrible, that is beyond the reach of a redemptive God, though full redemption may take place after we have departed this life.

As Jesus said, “I came so that they could have life” (John 10:10). Because we anticipate that time, that place when “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and he will rule forever and always” (Revelation 11:15).

Even in our honesty about death, we don’t lose hope for life!

Again Psalm 42: “AS a deer long for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God, My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

I picture the exiles coming back to the Holy Land, Singing: (from Isaiah passage), the Word that goes out from my mouth it shall not return to me empty, but will accomplish that for which I sent it. So happy, even the trees shall clap their hands! Thorns shall come up cypress! And the mountain and hills will burst into song!

YES - My mom is dying. But all of creation will do odd and wonderful things, clapping, singing. Oh, not just for her, but because Jesus defeated death, triumphed, and, in an amazing act of grace, takes us along through this veil of tears all the way to whatever realm God has in store for us in eternity!

Will there be tears! How do you feel???

Of course, there will be tears, memories are meant to hold us together. Stories to be told. Alzheimer’s is an awful disease, because even stories are taken away.

“I can only imagine” - what it will be like “to know” and be known! I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us says St. Paul. The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God’s sons and daughters, WE are saved in hope.

(Romans 8:18-19,24)

In this Joy we should keep spreading the Word that does not come back to God empty, but always has purpose. For in that hope we should keep planting the seed as the sower taught, always in expectation. Because our hearts should never be empty!

Amen.