

Note: This funeral sermon was difficult and a bit different for me than my usual. Let the reader understand . . .

Jesu Juva

“Hope”

Text: John 11:17-39a, 43-44;
1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 51-57; Genesis 37:29-35

James, Gordana, and David, Friends of Tony and Tony’s family . . .

Your minds are filled with questions. Your hearts are filled with grief. But God’s Word is filled with hope.

You wonder what you could have done. God’s Word tells us what Jesus has done for us, to rescue and save us.

Perhaps you are also filled with guilt. Were there signs you missed? Indications that something was wrong that you should have noticed? God’s Word tells us that there is forgiveness.

So that’s what we turn to on a day like this. Questions without answers provide no comfort. God’s Word gives us hope, and shows us the one greater than our sin, our grief, and our helplessness.

That doesn’t make today easy, of course. Grief and healing take time. But it points us in the right direction. To go to our Saviour with our every need. Our Saviour who grieves with us. Our Saviour who before the tomb of His friend Lazarus, wept like we do today. But who also said this: ***I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*** Words of hope.

You see, we live in a world gone horribly wrong. This is not the way things are supposed to be. God did not create us to die. Death was never part of the plan. Death is not a part of life, as some like to say today. Death is an intrusion. Death, as we heard, is the ***enemy***. And especially children are not supposed to die before their parents. But in this world gone horribly wrong, this world turned upside down by sin and death, that happens. And not just today, but from the beginning. Adam and Eve lost their son Abel. We heard today of Jacob mourning for his son Joseph who he thought had been killed by a wild beast - more on that in a moment. King David mourned for his son Absalom. And then there was Mary, who lost her son, too - Jesus - on a cross. But that wasn’t just Mary’s son who died there, but God’s Son. God knows what it’s like to lose a son, too.

But that loss is our gain. For God sent His Son into this world gone horribly wrong and give us hope. Into this world turned upside down and set it right again. To take our sin and guilt and provide forgiveness and hope. To die our death and provide life. That's God's plan. Sin and death, NO. Forgiveness and life, YES. Separation and grief, NO. Reunion and hope, YES.

And that's what Jesus did for us. Jesus died our death on the cross, to provide a way out of death. He entered into death to crack it open and give us hope. So that He could say those words to Mary and Martha: ***I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*** Words of hope. Words of life.

Sometimes, though, we think there is no hope. That my sadness, my trouble, my trial, my sin is too much. That there is no love greater than these, that could overcome these. But Jesus shows us there is. His love. And He showed it to us on the cross. That He would rather die than we die.

You see, while He was hanging there, many made fun of Him. They mocked Him and told Him to jump down and prove that He was who He said He was. That He really was God and not just a mere criminal getting what He deserved. That He really was strong and not weak. But He did not jump down. But not because He was weak, but because His love for us was strong. Because had He jumped down He would have saved Himself but lost us. So He stayed. To take our sin and give us forgiveness. To take our death and give us life. So while our hands turn against each other and maybe even turn against ourselves, His hands on the cross turned toward us; reached out to us, in love. That we see that He really is ***the way, the truth, and the life.***

Our sorrow and grief may make it hard to see that, as it did for Jesus' disciples - themselves wracked with sorrow and guilt - those days after Jesus died and lay in His tomb. But the disciples *would* see it. When Jesus rose from the dead, breaking its grip, gaining the victory over it, and showing Himself to them alive. Death is too strong for us, but not for Him.

And now He promises that victory to us. That just as He called Lazarus out of the grave with just His Word, so He would on the Last Day do that same for us. That sin let us go. That death let us go. That these enemies be defeated, and there be only life. Life with Him. Life forever. With no more sadness, fear, guilt, loneliness, tragedy, suffering, or tears. Right now, death looks victorious, and it stings. But it will not always be so. But, as we heard, ***thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Thanks be to God. Tony said those words with us in church week after week. He rejoiced in His Lord's forgiveness and Word and promises and gifts. As he told his mother, it was the way he wanted - he needed - to start every week. I also studied God's Word with him

during the week. He was a good student and asked good questions and looked forward to our time together. Which is all to say: Tony knew and loved His Saviour. So while the last hours of Tony's life are shrouded in mystery to us, that's the Tony I knew.

And that gives me hope. That like Jacob, who mourned his son but later saw him again, that so will I see Tony, together with all who depart this life with faith in Jesus - even if that faith is small as a mustard seed. For it is not the size of our faith that makes the difference, but the size and power of the one our faith is in. And who made, fulfilled, and will keep all His promises to us. Promises like the one we heard today: ***I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.***

I cannot answer why things happen as they do in this world. I do not even know why God would love us so much to give His Son for us! For who am I that God should do that for me? For you? And for Tony? But He did. We have a Saviour whose love is far greater than we could ever imagine. A Saviour we can trust.

So I included a little hymn in your bulletin for us to sing today. A children's hymn. For at times like this, we look to our heavenly Father as His children, with child-like faith. We look to Him for hope, for forgiveness, for comfort and strength. And He will not let us down.

So let us sing . . . (*Hymn LSB #729: I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus*)

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.