

Isaiah 57:1-2

Dear Friends in Christ,

Do you remember *The Parable of the Rich Fool*, the man who couldn't get enough of this world? Remember those chilling words, "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" (Lk. 12:20) *This night* - this moment - an appointed time known only to God. As Solomon said, "a time to be born, and a time to die." (Eccl. 3:2a)

Do you remember how the disciples reacted when Jesus told them about His suffering, death and resurrection? They couldn't get beyond the death part. Sometimes we experience the same problem at the death of a loved one or friend. We're comforted by the fact that Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus. Death is chilling, surreal, unnatural, and a reminder of what sin has done to us.

Do you remember what Jesus said about the dying and death His people see and endure? "Let not your hearts be troubled." (Jn. 14:1) And do you remember what He promised? "...I go and prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." (Jn. 14:2b,3) It's simple, if you know Scripture: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God (the gift - not something earned by good works) is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23)

Dying and death are ugly. Flesh wise, nobody really wants to go through it. Soul wise, the Christian looks beyond the here and now. So, let's explore . . .

WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS DIE

I. No One Lays It to Heart.

The righteous man perishes, and no one lays it to heart; devout men are taken away, while no one understands. (vs 1a)

Well, here we go. The righteous are not the worldly good people - the civilly righteous. They're not the philanthropist or the movie star who died a sudden death at a young age and is now "looking down" on everyone. The righteous are those who see their sinful nature, confess it and believe that Jesus paid the sin bill by perfectly keeping God's Commandments on our behalf - and then suffered and died for our sin crimes. Or, as Paul calls it, "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." (Rom 3:22) And, as an example, Paul quotes Genesis, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness (perfect obedience)." (Rom. 4:3) And then Paul says, "And to the one who does not work (falls into the delusion that God must love them because they've done their best!) but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." (Rom. 4:5)

The righteous are sinful humans who know God's love in Christ, walk in that love, share it and demonstrate it to others. Well....they die. You're going to die. I'm going to die. God's people die and "no one lays it to heart." No one understands what's happening. No one cares. Mercy, decency, the love of God dies - fades from the earth - and the world could care less! In fact, we are living in, perhaps, the most *care less time - ever*.

And more! As we move closer and closer to this world's last moment, Jesus said, "And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold." (Matt. 24:12) I know! Many will say, this is just so negative, can't we consider the positive things. I hope that's no-one here. Living in a fantasy isn't going to positively help anyone as this world hits the bottom of the barrel!

So listen: Jesus said, "'lawlessness will be (not might be, but will be) increased.'" And He said, as a result of that, "the love of many will (not might, but will) grow cold." And then He gives the positive, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matt. 24:13) That's the positive. To be saved! Forever with Jesus! But we must endure.

II. Is Taken Away from Calamity.

God then says this: "For the righteous man is taken away from calamity." (vs 1b) Calamity. I know you know what that means, but consider these definitions from Webster: "a state of deep distress or misery caused by major misfortune or loss... an extraordinarily grave event marked by great loss and lasting distress and affliction."

Most everyone in the Sanctuary this morning could sit down and write a little history of the grandparents, parents, spouses, children, brother or sister, and good friends who have died throughout the years - with more to come. Most everyone here has been or is going through some sort of conflict, disappointment, failure, tragedy, and illness that won't go away. And we are all living with the incredible corruption and lies of leadership and people entrusted with the care of life and health.

I prefer the second definition of calamity that I gave you from Webster: "...an extraordinarily grave event marked by great loss and **lasting** distress and affliction." So, Grandma died and will miss the birth of her first great-grandchild, the wedding of her grandson, the family gathering being planned for next summer....the....whatever. How sad. Really? Seriously?? If Grandma, or anyone (regardless of age), was a child of God through faith in Christ, died and went to heaven, just how sad is that? They're "taken away from calamity."

Well, at least "Grandma is looking down on us." Really? Seriously?? Why? For what? Because she's lonely... missing something... unhappy... inquisitive? Because the love, bliss and unending joy and peace of God are not enough? Because this world isn't all that bad? Do the words of Peter fit in your life?

"He (the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ) has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." (I Peter 1:3-4)

Listen and remember the words: "For the righteous man is taken away from calamity." The word "man" refers to a child of God redeemed by the blood of Christ, forgiven and granted Christ's promise: "whoever believes has eternal life." That's Grandma, Grandpa, Wife, Husband, Mother, Father, Sister, Brother, Teenager, Child, Infant. ***Taken away from calamity*** - forever!

And one final truth:

III. They Rest.

"...he (the child of God) enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness." (vs. 2)

Commentator John A. Braun writes:

They (the children of God through faith in Christ) enter peace. For them, death is not the end; they will enter a new world where peace dominates. The Hebrew word for "peace" connotes total well-being and happiness, a blessing that cannot be found outside of God. For the wicked there is no such peace (48:22; 57:21), but those believers whom God has taken to himself in death have such peace.... (People's Bible Commentary, Isaiah II, John A. Braun, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, 2001, p.270)

While we experience the hurt and momentary removal of our Christian loved ones and friends, we must let these words of Scripture be a true source of comfort and strength: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” (Rev. 14:13) That is, their works, regardless of how seemingly small or insignificant to the world, become the evidence of the faith they professed in this life.

And for us, left behind, we must look above the calamity of life here and hold on to these words of the Apostle Peter:

“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”
(1 Peter 1:8-9)

“The outcome of your faith” - our faith - has nothing to do with the degree of happiness and success with and in this world. It has everything to do with the eternal life Christ has won for us. Everything! ***Outcome of your faith - salvation of your souls.***

The world goes on as it always has. People are born, live, die and are quickly forgotten. But for those in Christ, God is always there - with us and for us. As David said, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...”. (Ps. 23:4) That’s now and He’s with us forever!

And that’s the way it is ***when the righteous die.***

Amen.

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Isaiah 57:1-2: ***“When the Righteous Die”***

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II. Is Taken Away from Calamity.

III. They Rest.

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