

## **All Saints Day Sermon: “Jesus Wept”**

November 1, 2009

Phillipians 1:18-26, John 2:25-26 & 35

As we get older, our attitude about death changes. Death becomes more of a reality and a present possibility than a theoretical conjecture.

For Paul, he sees death as a positive thing, not the same way many elderly, tired people do however. Many elderly who struggle and suffer with illness and loneliness..who suffer through the loss of all their friends and family who are their own age or near their age often end up asking me why they are still here. Why can't I just go to sleep and as one of my old friends used to say, “just wake up dead one morning?” There is no answer to that question, except that all things happen in God's good time...and we should make the most of the life God gives us. Many of these seniors are depressed...and need to deal with that depression.

Paul's view of death is not an escape from depression or pain. Far from it. Paul has a purpose, a vitality and vibrancy in life like few others. Paul enjoys life and as you read this letter of Phillipians, the theme that recurs over and over again is one of Joy and rejoicing in Christ Jesus. This is made even more extraordinary when we learn that Paul writes this epistle while in a Roman prison cell, literally one arm chained 24 hours a day to a Roman guard. Whatever Paul did, the guard did. Wherever Paul went, the Guard went. Whomever Paul met with, the guard met with...and if the guard decided he was tired and wanted to rest or go somewhere else, that is what they did without question or objection. After all, he was bigger than Paul and he had the sword and club!

So Paul writes this letter from a prison cell, chained to a Roman guard, awaiting a trial in which his very life might be forfeit for his preaching the gospel message and organizing the church's ministry. And he says again and again to Rejoice in the Lord, again I say Rejoice!

Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything by Pray and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God, and the peace of God will rule in your hearts through faith!

So Paul is ready at any moment he says to die. For Him, death is merely the next step in the spiritual journey. To die, he says, is gain. For when we depart this body, we are immediately joined to Christ our Lord. We are not the body...we are a living soul. We are more than flesh and blood, we are an eternal soul that continues to live forever. Our bodies are not who we are. We are a living soul. So when we depart the body, we are at home immediately with the Lord.

When we die, we go to our true home. To the place prepared for us in Christ. If I were to ask you to define what a HOME is, if you were wise, you would not describe a building, but a relationship with people who love you and care for you and provide a place for you...where you are protected, nurtured, fed, forgiven, loved completely, and welcomed always. A place where you are known better than you know yourself, where you are special...a place where you will live with Jesus himself, a place prepared just for you. Home.

John describes it in the Revelation as a place where God himself lives among us, and he is our God and we are his beloved children...and God himself wipes every tear from our eyes, and death will be no more, neither will there be mourning or crying or pain of any kind any more...for the former things have passed away and behold, God makes all things new!

Wow. So we know that Death will be ok. We need not fear it for ourselves or for our loved ones. Jesus said he is the resurrection and the life and that anyone who believes in him shall never die...never die in spirit!

As we approach the death of a loved one, or our own, our faith informs and transforms our view of it. They are not gone...only the body dies, the spirit lives with God and goes home to be with Jesus.

They are going home, home to where they are welcomed and forgiven and well loved...loved more than we can imagine. Going home.

But still, there is grief when we experience the loss of a loved one. Our faith helps us understand and gives us a foundation to build upon, but still there is a tremendous loss in our lives and we miss them terribly. Their death touches us deeply and we can not help but be affected deeply by it, depending upon the closeness of the relationship.

Grief is a normal human emotion and response to any significant loss. It is part of our common humanity, and remember, we are all made in God's image. Feeling loss reflects our sense of commitment and love that we had for the person. Grief is NOT a lack of trust or faith. We can and do experience profound grief and still believe deeply that our loved ones are at home with God. They are two different things. One is our response to our loss...the other is their gain.

The Apostle Paul says that we grieve, but not as those who are without hope... we who in Christ continue to grieve, but it is tempered by our Hope in Christ. Grief is our response to loss, and it is actually not limited to our experience of death, but can be triggered by ANY significant loss. It can be the loss of a job...layoffs trigger grief. It can be the loss of a home, foreclosures trigger grief. It can be the loss of a dream...the inability of to retire or the loss of your retirement accounts triggers grief! Divorce is another common source of grief! The loss of a partner and the dream of a happy married life also produce a grief response.

The stages of grief have become well known by many, but in case they are not known to you...they include Shock & Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression & Loneliness, Guilt, Adjustment, and eventually Acceptance & Hope.

These can come in any order, although Shock and Denial are almost always first. It is my belief that it takes at least a year to work through the grief of a major loss, to walk through the "Valley of the Shadow of Death" ...because you have to get through all the "firsts". The First Birthday, the First Christmas, the First Thanksgiving, etc.

The problem with the process of grief is that you feel so very alone. Your friends are usually with you for awhile, but for a short while. Then they think you should be over it by now. A couple of months and that's it, move on. Put it behind you...don't wallow...whatever that it. Most can't understand it, and a few can't pretend to.

So, if you are going through the Valley of the Shadow of death, know a couple of things

1<sup>st</sup>, it's ok and your ok. It's normal. You are not going crazy. But if you feel stuck in one of the stages of grief and it is starting to affect your life in negative ways, it may be time to talk it over with someone. See a counselor, or come see me.

2<sup>nd</sup>. God is with you in the midst of your grief. Remember the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm...Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, thou art with me...thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. The Rod is a the short club used to protect and the staff is the long stick used to support...to rescue the sheep and to support the shepherd. So the rod and the staff represent God's protection and God's strength and support. God is not just with us, God helps us. And Remember Jesus with Martha and Mary at the Tomb...Jesus Wept. Jesus shared their grief. He knew that Lazarus was live in God, and he knew that He was going to raise him back to earthly life in a few moments...but Jesus also knew the grief these two sisters were experiencing...and he shared their grief with them. He did not dismiss it. He did not belittle it. He did not think it a lack of faith. As they wept at the tomb, Jesus joined with them. Jesus Wept. The shortest verse in the whole of the Bible, but it says so much of His compassion for us. He joins with us in our pain and sorrow and grief. He joins in our losses...and sympathizes with us. Jesus wept with Mary and Martha. No big show. Just Jesus loving them, and loving us. As you go through the valley of the shadow...and

you experience grief for whatever reason, whatever loss...know that Jesus weeps with you...you are never alone, and He cares for you.

3<sup>rd</sup>. We are here for you. We who follow Jesus' example seek to be with you too. To simply let you grieve. What can you do for a friend who has lost someone? Just be there...don't preach. Don't correct. Don't try and answer their unanswerable questions of why! Don't try and convince or convert...just be there. Be God's presence...to show God's love. To weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.

That's how you help someone in their time of grief. By merely being with them. By letting them talk and letting them express whatever emotion their grief produces without judgment. Remember, Jesus wept. He joined the Human race completely...