

It is safe to say that Ron's passing caught us all off guard. While we knew that Ron's health had been tested over the past years, I don't think anyone expected to be here for his funeral on February 10, just a mere seven months since we all gathered here to say goodbye to his wife, my grandmother Duthiel.

One of the most emotional events in life is the passing of a grandparent. I am honored that the family has entrusted me to preside today and eulogize a man that we all loved. Ron was a man that touched countless lives, as evidenced by your attendance today.

When we are called to mourn, one of the things that we find comfort in is the sharing of memories of the deceased. I know that we have countless stories about Ron and invite you to all share them with each other and the family at the dinner following the service. This is one of the ways we are able to realize how gracious our God is that he has given us a father, grandfather, brother, spouse, neighbor and friend to love and cherish over the many years.

Yet, mourning can be quite a burden, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We wonder if we will be able to make it. We'll sometimes wonder why this happened; why now, why this way? It's quite a burden we carry with us today.

As we mourn, sometimes we're going to ask the question, where is God in our suffering? Where was God when He decided that Ron had enough suffering in this life, and took him into His presence? Doesn't He know what it's like to lose a loved one? Doesn't He care?

As I was returning to Idaho following Ron's passing some of the same questions raced through my mind. But as I was preparing for today, I read part of John's Gospel, which I will share with you.

In John 11 we have the account of Jesus bringing Lazarus back to life. Since some folks might accuse me of liking to hear myself talk, I'll give you the condensed version.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were brother and sisters who lived in the village of Bethany. They were good friends of Jesus and His disciples, in fact, when He was in the area, Jesus would often stay at Mary and Martha's house. Now, Lazarus became pretty sick, and his illness was pretty severe. So his sister, Mary, sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick and perhaps about to die. Jesus doesn't get to Bethany right away, it's another two days before he even starts out on the trip, and another two days after that before He arrives in Bethany. By the time Jesus arrives, Lazarus has died, and has been dead for four days, indicating that he had passed away shortly after the messengers had been sent to Jesus, so even if Jesus had started out right away, He'd have been too late. By this time, several Jews from the surrounding area had come to Mary and Martha to comfort them, and Lazarus' body had been placed in a tomb. Martha went out to meet Jesus, and she said to him "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus responds by telling her that her brother would rise again, to which she responds in faith "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

At this point, Lazarus has been dead for four days, his funeral has already taken place, and Mary and Martha are trying to get their lives in order. They're in the

same situation you and I are in today, facing a stark, cruel reality. Our loved one is dead. Ronald isn't coming home. He won't be attending the antique tractor club meetings, exploring the Idaho backcountry and history or be able to enjoy the company of his children and grandchildren. While his health had declined in recent years to where he wasn't able to get out and do a lot of the things he enjoyed doing, we could still talk with him, laugh with him, and enjoy being with him, enjoy his presence. But now, we can't do that anymore, and it's hard. It's not fair! Yet, what a leap of faith Mary and Martha took when Jesus arrives after the funeral, and they know that Lazarus will rise again. Even when things seem hopeless.

Jesus responds to Martha "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Martha responds that she does. She goes to get her sister, Mary, and they take Jesus to the tomb. Now at this point, Martha, Mary, and the crowd of Jews might have heard these words of Jesus, but maybe they doubted them. Maybe they wanted to say "Hey, Jesus, don't you get it? He's dead! Dead people don't get up and walk after they've been dead for 4 days! There's no hope here, stop leading these poor women on and get out of here already!" And maybe you too are sitting here today, with those same types of doubts, wondering if Jesus really understands your pain. He's God after all, what does he care if someone dies?

What happens next is just powerful.

Jesus saw Mary, Martha, and all the Jews who were there in their grief, he saw them shedding tears, crying out in grief, and what does he do? We're told he's quite moved at the sight, and troubled. He asks where Lazarus is buried and they take

Him to the tomb. When He gets there, we're told in the shortest verse in our Bibles, "Jesus wept."

Yeah, that's right. The same God who was there at the beginning of creation, Jesus, who had said He is the resurrection and the life, cries. He's crying over the death of a friend. He feels the pain, the anguish, the grief, the same emotions all of us here today are feeling. He's not some distant God, or a God who can't relate, He's a God who cries with us, sympathizes with us, grieves with us. He then says a prayer, and calls into the tomb "Lazarus, come out!", and to everyone's amazement, Lazarus comes out of the tomb. Alive! He gives Martha and Mary their brother back. Tears of sadness are turned to tears of joy!

Now wouldn't that be a sight if Jesus walked in right now, called out "Ron, come out of the urn," and he did? Like in Ezexcial when we learn about the dry bones, the Lord says to the bones" I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you, and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. We'd have our father, grandfather, brother and friend back. Our tears of sadness would turn to tears of joy. But, that's not going to happen, is it? So then why did I bother telling you this story?

Well, even though Lazarus was raised from the dead, there did come a day where his body would go back in a tomb, and this time, it wouldn't come out. It's a day we're all having to deal with sometime in our lives. At funerals, we're reminded that the wages of sin is death and we see that first hand. All one has to do is look at this urn to be reminded of that. I often hear people say that "Death is just a natural part of life." My response to that is "I don't think so." You see, death hurts! It hurts the person who dies, because it often weakens their once strong bodies, robbing

them of their ability to talk, walk, or do a lot of the things they enjoyed doing in life. If death is a natural part of life, then why did the moment he was pronounced dead hurt so much? Why does today hurt so much for us? Death isn't natural. Don't let anyone fool you, you and I were not created originally to die, we were created to live. Sin destroyed that.

But God uses death to bring us to eternal life. With living in a sin filled world, we also have to endure suffering. Grandpa wasn't immune to it, for the past several years, he wasn't able to get around as easily as he once could. Yet, God used his death to deliver him from that suffering. Today, he's in a place where there is no such thing as suffering, no more health problems, no more aches and pains, weakened eyesight, any of that. Now that's something to be joyful for, that today he is in paradise.

Yet for you and me, we still grieve. He won't be here for holidays, we won't ever be planning a big 90th birthday party, I won't hear him talk about how much he enjoyed the previous celebrations and family gatherings we had for and with him. I won't hear him talk about tractors, Idaho history, the "good old days on the farm", or how life was growing up for him. Most of all, I won't be able to hear him tell me how proud he was of me. Even though I didn't see him as often as I did growing up with him coming to all of our events at school we always stayed connected whether I was 10, 16, or 25 whether I was in high school or graduating with my law degree and stepping back to the family farm.

Now,

We have heard a lot today about death, so what is death?

The dictionary defines death as the end of life, the end of biological functions.

Doctors define death in 2 terms – the ceasing of brain activity and the ceasing of vital organ activity.

As you read through the Bible it is interesting to note that God also gives 2 definitions of death.

For the unbelieving person in this world death is said to be eternal death in the torments of hell. Forever separated from God's love and mercy. For the vast majority of people, an occasion such as this is a very sad one. It is sad for them because they have no hope. To them death only means defeat. Biological life comes to an end and after that it's over. They view death as the final end. For them death and the funeral service that follows are indeed very sad occasions.

But for the believer who dies in the Lord – they just merely fall asleep because Jesus Christ has defeated death for us and when they awake they are in heaven. For the believing child of God, death is not the end but a new beginning.

Ever since man fell into sin, death has reigned in this world. The Bible reminds us Rom. 5:12 “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” If man had not fallen into sin, if we were not sinners, a funeral such as this one would be unnecessary, because no one would die. We would all live forever.

But we know this not to be the case because we have the result of sin is before us this morning and God's word tells us “as in Adam all die.” God however, does not want to leave us in despair. He wants us to know as he tells us in the book of Romans, “The wages of sin is death,” but he does not end it there.

Yes God tells us “the wages of sin is death,” but he also finishes the sentence with “the gift of God is eternal life.”

Yes God tells us “in Adam all die,” but God finishes the sentence with “in Christ all will be made alive.”

This is the promise we have from God. Physical functions may cease and life as we know it in this world may come to an end, but death is not the end for those who have faith in Christ. God’s children shall not die but shall live forever. Jesus tells us: “Because I live, you also shall live.” Jesus tells us “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

We might ask ourselves, "How can we be sure that Ron is in heaven?"

Well, Ron didn’t earn his way into heaven by committing good deeds and giving to charities.

He is walking beside his Savior not because he belonged to this church for his entire lifetime.

Ron is in heaven not because he was a perfect person.

He was a sinner just like you and me. But he was also a forgiven sinner.

Through Word and Sacrament he was assured that his sins were all forgiven for Jesus’ sake. Through Word and Sacrament Ron came to know why death is in this world. He knew that all mankind is sinful from birth and our sinfulness separates us from God. But he also knew what God has done to remove our sin. How God sent his one and only Son into this world to live the perfect life that God requires and then to pay the wages of our sin by his innocent death. He believed in Jesus as his Savior and his faith in Jesus is why his soul is now in heaven.

Through Word and Sacrament Ron came to know and trust God’s word that says “In Christ all will be made alive.”

This is our resurrection hope, glorious, comforting and sure.

As death and the grave could not hold Jesus, so it cannot hold those who die trusting in him, trusting in Christ, “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” Because of Christ’s victory over death, Ron's mortal remains that we place in the grave today will not remain there.

The day will come when Christ will return and raise all the dead including the body of your loved one. Death is defeated! Our hope is in the resurrection of the body when Jesus will return!

While for many a service such as this is a sad one, one that means defeat.

For the believer in Christ, a funeral service is a service of victory.

Even though you feel a great hurt and a great loss because a loved one has been taken away from you, yet you know that now he is with his Savior in heaven. His soul is in heaven enjoying the blessings and glory that is in store for all believers. On the day that Christ returns his body will be raised from the dead and reunited with his soul in heaven.

Today is a sad time for we are saddened by the loss of a loved one. But do not grieve as those who have no hope – rejoice because Ron is now enjoying the promise God made to him. “Be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life.” May you find peace of mind and spirit in all of God’s promises. Amen.