

Knowing Jesus in Life and at Death

written for the Door County Advocate July 28, 2007

I've been to well over a hundred funerals and memorial services in my life. I have officiated at more than 55. I have been part of the congregation for many more than that. I was at a funeral this past week; I saw some of you there.

Funerals are rarely happy occasions, but sometimes they are. When the person who died had a deep and joyful faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and therefore had confidence and peace about eternity, a funeral can be a chance for celebrating the life of an individual and the love and grace of God. For example, the memorial service for my mother almost 10 years ago was not a festive event, but there was a lot of laughter to go along with many tears. My mom knew Jesus well as her Savior and Leader. I believe in the sovereignty of God – that he is in control of absolutely everything. Because of these two realities, accepting the sudden death of a beloved mother was much easier, I am persuaded, than if Mom did not care about Christ or if I believed that God sometimes says “Oops.”

If you do not go to funerals, I think you should consider trying to get to a few each year. A funeral is a good time to think about the things that matter most. A funeral reminds us that life on earth does come to an end – and then what? A funeral calls us to consider how we are spending our lives and what we are doing with the precious few years we have been granted on this planet. A funeral provides a filter for looking at our lives and assessing if we're living well and wisely or wasting our lives and being stupid.

When I plan a funeral message, or when I stand next to the casket of a friend, I picture myself in that casket. That probably sounds morbid to some of you, or it sounds to others like too much negative thinking, and you're just not about negative energy. But face the facts, friends: You are going to die someday; everyone is going to die someday. Are you living the sort of life now that means something? Are you the sort of person who will be missed, really – and for any kind of good reason? If you want to be remembered for higher and nobler reasons, what are you doing today that makes you think you'll be remembered that way? These are some of the reasons why I appreciate funerals, and why I recommend you go to a few each year.

When you go to a funeral, you are confronted with your own mortality. And whether you think so or not, you're mortal. You will break down. You will die. The Bible says it, in more than one place: "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." (That's in Peter's first letter, and he's quoting the prophet Isaiah.) So what is important is to trust the promises of God, and value what he thinks is important, and humbly ask him to bring your life into alignment with his plans and purposes.

Moses, the man of God, thought this when he wrote a song that we find in Psalm 90. This is part of the lyric: “Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” Another songwriter once put it simply this way: “Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last.”

Enjoy every day and be grateful for the blessings of living. But be ready for the end – and you do not need to be afraid of dying. Knowing God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son is the way to live and the way to die.

Bible verses are from [The Holy Bible, English Standard Version](#) (ESV).