

“Having Eternal Life”

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Lois, Debbie, Sheri, Charles, the entire family – brothers and sisters in Christ, and all who are gathered here this day – may Christ’s PEACE be yours this day, and in all the days to come. Amen.

In the Old Testament the Prophet Hosea cries out: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” Well, the sting of death is right here – in our hearts and lives – right here before our eyes – and our eyes tell us that death is victorious.

To all who are confronted with death, Jesus says: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”

That’s easier said than done – especially when the sting of death is so fresh – when death has taken our loved one away from us. How can Jesus say such a thing? His words seem so out of touch – hollow – irrelevant for the situation at hand.

But do you remember the context in which Jesus first spoke these words? He is gathered with His disciples in the upper room – “on the night in which He was betrayed.” Judas has already left – His betrayal is already set in motion – and soon His arrest and crucifixion.

Jesus knows full well what lies ahead – for Himself, and for His disciples. So He prepares them for His death, saying: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”

Jesus speaks these words to you today – to you who have come face to face with death. He wants you to hear and believe His promises. “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”

Jesus was going to His crucifixion – a sacrifice and a death that has prepared a place in heaven for Larry – for you, and for all who would believe in Him. He prepares the way so that one may follow Him through life, and death, and the grave – to life everlasting in His Father’s house.

“On this mountain,” the prophet says – on Mount Calvary – Jesus will “swallow up ... the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever.”

Death has come to Larry, as it comes to all people – because all have sinned, and sin brings death. But God has sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, who “became sin for us.” Jesus has taken all of Larry’s sin, and the sin of the whole world – as His very own – and He dies the death it requires.

Jesus has paid the ransom price for sin and death is swallowed up forever. “It is finished,” Jesus declares. Salvation won! A place prepared for Larry! Contrary to what your eyes see – death is not victorious – Christ IS!

His resurrection on the third day shows forth to the world that the sin He bore has been redeemed – death has been defeated – and He has brought life and immortality to light. For Larry, and all who are united to Christ by faith – death cannot separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. That’s why Jesus can say to you today: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.”

To all who would follow Jesus – whether that be Peter, James, John, Thomas or Larry – Jesus says: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Some may think that Jesus is just setting an example for us – as if He’s saying – “I’ve shown you the way, now follow my lead and hopefully you can make it through death and the grave.” But Jesus isn’t just on the other side waiting for us – He is the one who have given the promise with Holy Baptism – that, “I will be with you always, even unto the end of the age.”

The same Jesus who was victorious over sin and death – who passed through the grave, was raised to life again on the third day, and has ascended into heaven – is the same Jesus who was with Larry Ikenberry throughout his life. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, guiding, leading, feeding, providing and protecting Larry.

And now, again, as He promised – He has come back to take Larry to be with Him, that where Jesus is, there Larry is also. He has led Larry through death and the grave to life everlasting – bringing him to his eternal home in the Father’s house.

Was Larry’s heart troubled in this world? Absolutely. Not only the battle with cancer – but caring for Lois and his family – and wanting them to be cared for after he was gone. In the midst of all this – the Lord was with Larry – working in him a faith that trusted that the Lord would provide – and using him as His instrument for the good of others – as husband, father, grandpa, friend, and brother in Christ.

When his days were coming to a close – and Larry knew it – he was not afraid to die. The Lord who prepared his salvation had also prepared him for his death. His heart was not troubled, because the Lord was with him, speaking His promises into his ears.

“Truly. Truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believe Him who sent me HAS eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (St. John 5:24) “This is my Body, given for you ... my Blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sin.”

“I am with you always,” Larry – I will lead you through death and the grave – “I will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

Dearly beloved, Larry is with Jesus in our heavenly Father’s house – he has crossed over from death to life. Therefore, Jesus says: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.