

“The Body”

Grace, mercy, and PEACE to you, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To the family of Duane Arends – to all our brothers and sisters in Christ, and all who are gathered here today – may Christ’s peace be yours today, and in all the days to come. Amen.

“Now a certain man was ill” – Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Earlier in John’s Gospel we are told that the sisters plead with Jesus to come – but He stays put, two more days. The illness that afflicts Lazarus overcomes him, and he dies. But Jesus says – “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

When Jesus finally comes to the mourning sisters – one would expect them to be livid with Him – but Martha still trusts that Jesus can help her brother, even though he has died. “I am the resurrection and the life,” Jesus says. “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes,” Martha replies.

Then it’s off to the grave where Lazarus has been laid. “Take away the stone,” Jesus says – but the sisters don’t think that’s a good idea – after all, he’s been there four days, “there will be an odor.” “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?”, Jesus says.

And then we see His glory – the reason why the Son of God has come into our world – to defeat death and the grave, and bring forth life. “Lazarus, come out” He proclaims – and the dead man came out.

Now there was a certain man who was ill – Duane, the brother of Barbara – and lovingly called “Uncle” by many. His illness also overcame him – and yet, it does not end in death – for as Jesus promises, “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

Like Lazarus, Duane's body revealed the destruction that mankind's in has brought into God's "very good" creation. God warns us that the "wages of sin is death" – and indeed, death comes to all of us, for we are sinners, one and all.

We carry this reminder around in our bodies. Duane's suffering was certainly not pleasant. He knew death was at hand. A number of times over the last few weeks he wished he could hit the "fast-forward" button – to get through this suffering – for he did not fear death, but believed that Jesus was his resurrection and his life.

Jesus knows that Lazarus is dead – but He comes to him anyway – because his body is important. In the beginning, God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Adam's body, Lazarus' body, Duane's body, your body – all are part of God's "very good" creation.

As the prophet Jeremiah tells us, the Lord "knit you together in your mother's womb." Your body is so important that the very Son of God took on body of human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary in order to redeem you (both body and soul).

Jesus comes and resurrects Lazarus' body from death to life – and promises "the resurrection of the body" and the "life everlasting" to all who believe in Him. Job cannot say it any more clearly: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another."

Indeed, Duane's body – your body – is important. It is part of who you were created to be – body and soul together – not just for this life, but also for the life everlasting.

In the beginning, the devil's lie led man into sin, bringing destruction and death to God's "very good" creation.

There is this ancient heresy call Gnosticism – which is nothing other than the devil's lie – which preaches that obtaining a special/secret knowledge is what sets one free – and that the material, including the body, is evil – and therefore, the goal is to leave it behind.

That is not what God has revealed to you in His Word. That is not what He says about your body that He has created as “good.” And yet, we also know that we are by nature sinful and unclean. Sin has so thoroughly soaked our flesh that we don’t know what it is like to live without it.

This is exactly why the Son of God took on human flesh – to redeem your flesh – to set you free from sin. Sinful man must look away from himself to be saved – not to some disembodied hope – but to God-in-the-flesh-Jesus – who has redeemed you with His holy, precious blood, and with His innocent suffering and death. The One who has redeemed Duane.

God’s Word says that Duane’s body is the “temple of the Holy Spirit”? When he was baptized by Christ, the Lord promised that He would be with Duane always, even to the end of the age. The Lord created Duane’s body so that he might live in it – so that the Lord might be at work in and through Duane – for the benefit of those around him.

Duane, God’s servant, the hands and mouth of God – to teach so many students over many years – to love his family so deeply – even to craft Lenten crosses to remind others of what Christ has done “for you” with His body.

The Gnostic denial of the body is not just foolish and deceiving – but it misses out on the goodness of the body – and that is sorely needed in our day. It is good that He created us as male or female. It is good that He has given us our body and soul – so that we might live as the dear child of our dear Father who is in heaven.

Oh, how we miss Duane – the look in his eye, the smile on his face – the way he greeted us when we came to church – the words he used to dote on his family. Rather than escape from God’s good creation by denying the body – we rejoice in the life He has given to Duane, and to us.

This body is perishable, but it shall be raised imperishable. This mortal body will put on immortality – for death has been swallowed up in victory, Christ’s victory over sin, death and the grave.

Already Duane lives eternally with Christ – but on the Last Day, He who is the resurrection and the life, will return and cry out – “Duane, come out” --- so that he might live eternally, in body and soul – with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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