

**Funeral Sermon for Fred Snook
March 11, 2023**

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The paradox of death for Christians is that it is both an enemy to be resisted and a friend to be welcomed. By that I mean to say that from the perspective of the Law, death hurts. It separates. It ends relationships and leaves huge holes in our hearts. But from the viewpoint of the Gospel, death is a gateway into a place that is far better. Paul says it this way to the Romans - *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

To the Corinthians, Paul says it this way, *“Death is swallowed up in victory. O grave where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Those words remind me of the only job I ever quit. It was the summer of 1972, and I worked for a local beekeeper. For the first two months, I painted his beehives, which was no problem. Then we began to extract the honey, and my job included getting stung by honeybees several times a day. My boss told me to wear light clothing and to relax, since the bees could sense if you were anxious. Right. And if a bee did sting me, I was to scrape off the stinger with my finger nail and keep working. No big deal, in his mind.

Although I did quit that job, he was right. It was possible to scrape away the stinger and keep on working. And so it is with the death of loved ones, it stings, it wounds, and it hurts bad. Life is never really the same. And I’m not so much suggesting that we ever get “over the death of loved ones.” But it is possible to deal with the sting, and to keep on putting one foot in front of the other. By faith. In Jesus Christ and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We memorialize Fred Snook today, believing that his soul is already in the presence of Christ. Believing that illness and disease and hospitals and hospice programs and urns and cemeteries don’t get the final word around here - Jesus

Christ gets the final word. Believing that the day is coming when the trumpet will be blowing and the archangel will be shouting and all knees will be bending and all lips will be confessing and Christ will be returning and there will in fact be a resurrection of this body and everlasting life for all who are believing in Jesus as Savior.

A Senator from Louisiana who is famous for his wit recently declared that “he really didn’t care what anyone else thought of him. Except for dogs, because he likes dogs and dogs like him. At memorial services it does matter what friends and family say about their loved ones. But even more importantly, it matters what God might say. And we know what God says about those who have been baptized and are believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior - they shall be saved! And so, until that day of glory comes, we live here and now by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. And we respond to that grace by doing the good works that God has ordained for us to do before we were ever born.

Two attributes of God I invite you to lean on and be comforted by today - ***Attribute #1 is the grace of God, which is a gift meant to be received and enjoyed.***

At the very heart of what we believe is that salvation is a gift of God that can not in any way, shape, or form, be merited or deserved by the good that we do. Gifts are by definition the opposite of wages. Paul writes to the Roman Christians that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The wisdom of this world says that you get what you have coming in life, and in many ways, that is true. But the wisdom from on high says that by the grace of God we get what Christ has earned for us by his birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection. Worldly wisdom says that death is an enemy to be avoided at all cost, but wisdom from on high says that from the viewpoint of the Gospel, death for the Christian becomes a gateway into heaven. Worldly truth is that the death of Charles is a huge loss for all of you, but wisdom according to Holy Scripture is that for Charles, death was a step into the presence of Christ.

Paul said it this way - for me to live is Christ, but to die is gain. And again, I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Even though there is a hole in your heart that never really will be filled this side of heaven, we rejoice that not only did Fred receive the gift of God’s grace in the waters of Baptism, as life went on, he swam in those Baptismal waters.

Today, I invite all of you to rest in the simple truth that it is in God's nature to love, to give. He delights in giving what I like to call both First and Second Article gifts. First Article gifts include life itself. First Article gifts include our bodies and souls, eyes, ears, and all our members, our reason and all our senses. In Fred's case, I'm told that included a wonderful and maybe at times a bit twisted sense of humor. We thank God today for creating Fred wonderfully and marvelously, for arranging the stars so that he could be blessed with a faithful bride, for blessing him with Godly parents, siblings, children, grandchildren, and a great grandchild, for blessing him (if my math is correct) 29,240 sunrises and sunsets and everything in between.

Second Article gifts are even more precious. The day Fred was baptized, the sign of the cross was placed both upon his forehead and his heart. As the waters splashed, sins were washed away, his name was written in the book of life, His Father in heaven claimed him as a dear and beloved Son. In all the chapters of his life, the Good Shepherd followed him around with goodness and mercy.

The death of a loved one reminds us that taking for granted gifts of time and treasure and relationships is one of the biggest mistakes we can make. One more time today, we learn again that each new sunrise, each conversation, each opportunity to love and be loved, is in fact a gift of God to be opened, enjoyed, shared, and celebrated.

Attribute #2 taught by Ephesians 2:8-10 is the omnipotence of God, which is a fact meant to give our lives meaning and purpose.

Permit me to paraphrase Paul, as he writes to the Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 10. **For Fred Snook was God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that he should walk in them.**

The Scriptures make it clear that God knew exactly how many years, months, and days, Fred would live here on earth before he was ever born. That already inside of his mother's womb, it was God knitting him together with a particular design and specific purposes. No doubt those of you who called him husband or dad or Grandpa or brother or brother in law could tell stories of good deeds he has done, good habits he had developed, good words that he shared, etc. And today is a terrific day to tell and enjoy those stories.

Of course the best news about your loved one isn't the good works that he has done, the best news is that his sins were forgiven. The ways in which he fell short, they have been covered over by the grace of a God Who loved him deeply. The

mistakes that he made and the failures that you might remember and the faults that could be recorded, they have been hoisted onto the shoulders of Jesus Christ, they have been taken to the cross, they are like stains that have been washed away, they are like bricks dropped into the ocean, they are memories sent away as far as the east is from the west. That's the language of Christianity, though our sins are as scarlet, as like to say in the Midwest, they shall be white as snow.

To believe that our God is omnipotent (all powerful) and omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipresent is to know that on our best days, we are children of God who have every reason in the world to be thanking and praising, serving and obeying. On our worst days, we are children of God knowing that He is working everything out for our good. On every one of our days, we are the dearly loved children of God with a simple assignment - to live one day at a time. Knowing on the one hand that the flaws and failures of our past have been forgiven and forgotten in the courtroom of Almighty God. And on the other hand, believing that the trials and troubles of tomorrow are in the hands of our God and may be dealt with at that time.

In closing, I offer to you a childhood memory with which many of you might resonate. Keep in mind that I grew up in the frozen tundra of rural North Dakota. And one cold winter night, we were celebrating a birthday at Aunt Linny and Uncle Eldo's house - some 20 miles away or so. On the way home, I did what most kids do. I fell asleep, trusting that Dad would get us safely home. Since I was and still am the baby of the family, my dad with the strong arms picked me up, and carried me all the way upstairs and laid me in bed. Yes, I was awake, and if you're wondering, yes, I pretended to be asleep. It felt so good. The evening was topped off by my dear Mom embracing me, saying prayers with me, declaring her love for me, and inviting me to sleep in peace.

Dear friends in Christ, this morning, I pray that you would live every one of your days knowing that God loves you, that He is with you, He is for you, He is alongside you, He is out in front leading you, and He is in back of you helping to pick up the pieces. Your Father in heaven has strong arms, and He invites you any time of the day or night to run to him for refuge, for comfort, and for reassurance. Know that at the moment of his death, the angels of God carried the soul and the spirit of your beloved into the very presence of Christ. May God keep you strong in your Christian faith as you look forward to a heavenly reunion, and may Fred Snook rest in peace. In Jesus' Name. Amen.