

John Simerman Funeral Sermon
November 3, 2022
Fero Funeral Home
5955 North Lecanto Highway, Beverly Hills, FL

Text - Matthew 11:28-30 - "Come to me, all those laboring and heavy laden and having been loaded down. I myself will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, that I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is pleasant and my burden is light."

John 10 - "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Dear Friends in Christ,

There is an old parable in Africa that goes something like this.

Every morning in Africa, when the sun comes up, a gazelle awakens and knows that it must run faster than the fastest lion, or it will perish. Every morning in Africa, when the sun comes up, a lion awakens and knows that it must run faster than the slowest gazelle, or it will go hungry. It doesn't make any difference if you are a gazelle or a lion. Every morning in Africa, when the sun comes up, you need to be running.

The law of the jungle carries with it a heavy burden. It is the survival of the fittest. Life in the jungle is full trees, underbrush, and thick vegetation. There are trails to follow, but they often disappear. Every day for every animal, without exception, is loaded down with an endless cycle of chasing after and hiding from. Pursuing and being pursued. Straining forward and holding back. Living every day with a fear of dying. Loaded down, burdened, never really finding the kind of refuge where you can rest free and relax.

In Jesus' day, the Pharisees were loading down the common folks with the demands of the law. They were insisting that sinners would have to try and work out their own salvation. That if you really wanted peace and contentment, you would need to strive and keep striving. Folks were loaded down with the idea that happiness and rest and joy could be achieved only with a constant laboring, working hard / earning your own way into the pearly gates of paradise.

In contrast to those who would make religion a list of rules and regulations that have to be obeyed, Jesus Christ would invite us in every one of our days to come to Him and rest in His love. We all have at least kinds of burdens that load us down and keep us from being all that God is calling us to be.

- Guilt over past mistakes
- Stress over current circumstances
- Anxiety with regard to future challenges

In every season of John's life, Jesus was His Good Shepherd - the one who laid down His life in the first place and then followed him around with goodness and mercy in the second place. As we remember and celebrate John's life these past 90 years plus, we do so with the confidence that his sins, your sins, and mine were paid for at the cross on a little hill outside of Jerusalem. We celebrate that in Holy Baptism, John was adopted into the family of God, the sign of the cross was placed on his forehead and his heart, signifying that Jesus Christ loved Him and that He was with Him and He was for Him in all the circumstances of life, with no exceptions.

Scriptures are full of metaphors intended to help us understand what it means to rest in God's love. Three such metaphors I offer to you today.

Metaphor #1 is of a father carrying and protecting and providing for his children. (Story of growing up on a farm in North Dakota / we would come home late at night after visiting aunts and uncles and cousins / I would fall asleep in the car / Dad would carry me from the car all the way into the house and up the narrow stairs into my bed, where he would tuck me in where it was warm and safe and pleasant. Did I ever pretend to be asleep so that I would get the full ride? Absolutely!)

So also does our Father in heaven invite us to come to him for help in every one of our days, as a child would approach a loving dad or mom.

Metaphor #2 is that Jesus is that Brother / Friend who looks out for us and defends us and will never leave us to fend for ourselves.

(Story of being a seventh grader / farm boy / putting on football equipment for the first time - jerseys with hip pads, knee pads, rib pads, shoulder pads / I was having a hard time figuring it out / an upperclassman named Leroy Fickert started to make fun of me / I was nervous and anxious and about to start crying, which isn't a good thing for football players to do / my brother Curtis stepped in, he told the bully

Leroy to knock it off, to leave me alone, he showed me how to put on my equipment / all was well.

In all seasons of John's life, Jesus was that big brother, He was that friend who came alongside of him / he was the one who guided John and Carol through all the ups and downs of married life and raising up a family.

Metaphor #3 - is that of a friend laying down his life for his friends / or a shepherd laying down his life for sheep that he truly cares for. John and those who have served in the military understand the idea of sacrifice better than those of us who haven't served - that's just a theory that I have. This afternoon, we celebrate John's service to his country. We thank God for men and women willing to put themselves at risk for unknown multitudes of people who may or may not appreciate what they have done.

So also with our Savior's sacrifice at Calvary. He died for all, even though many could have care less. He paid for the sins of everyone, even though many never receive the precious gift of the forgiveness of their sins.

This is the rhythm of Christianity. God gives, and we receive. He loves us first, we receive that love, we live in and enjoy that love, and we spend our days loving one another in response to that love. He forgives our flaws and failures, we receive that forgiveness, we live in and enjoy that forgiveness, and we spend our days forgiving one another, even if they are neither apologizing nor mending their ways.

The rhythm of Christianity is to do more than survive life. It is to be enjoying the blessings of life, even when grief comes knocking at our doors. Jesus declared that he came that we might have life, and that we might have it abundantly. Today we celebrate the abundant life that John and Carol enjoyed through all the ups and down of life. In so many ways, at so many family events, the gifts of God were given, received, enjoyed, and given away again. Thanks be to God.

In closing today, I remind you that there are two distinctive ways to grieve the loss of a loved one. One is to grieve without hope, and the other is to grieve with hope. This afternoon, I invite you to do your grieving as the loved and forgiven and precious people of God. We say farewell to John with the confidence that at the moment of death, the angels of God carried his soul into the very presence of His Savior. That already now He is resting in the strength and goodness of Jesus. That the day is coming soon, when there will be a resurrection of this body, a reuniting of body and soul, and life forever face to face with Jesus.

I close with the familiar Footprints poem, with an ending that might surprise you.

When the last scene of my life flashed before me, I looked back. I noticed that at some times along the path there was only one set of footprints. At other times, there was one set of footprints along with gauges and irregular lines in the sand. I also noticed that this happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life. This bothered me, and I questioned the Lord, "Lord you said you would walk with me all the way. I have noticed that during my most troubled times, you were not with me. The Lord replied, "My precious child, I love you and would never, ever leave you during your times of trial and suffering. It was then that I carried you."

But what about those times when there was all of that gouging and irregular lines in the sand? It was then that I carried you and dragged you, kicking and screaming.

This afternoon, we would learn one more time to rest in God's love. When the sailing is smooth and easy, that's not at all hard to do. But when the storms are storming and the winds and the waves are roaring, it's a challenge. My prayer today is that God's mercy would call you again and again to be still and know that He is God. That you would never forget that your sins have been sent away as far as Korea is from Citrus County. That our mistakes and bad habits and poor decisions have been washed away by the blood of the Lamb of God. That our worries and anxieties with regard to the future may be cast again and again into the arms of our Savior who cares deeply for us. May God bless the loved ones of John Simerman, and may he rest in peace. Amen.