

## **“This is Eternal Life”**

### **John 17:1-5**

On Saturday morning, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2 months ago, I arrived in the office to record the Warmline and noticed a message on the Divinity land line. It was Diana, Erik Schumacher’s daughter who is a nurse practitioner at Southwest, letting me know he was in ICU at Metro after falling from a ladder and probably wouldn’t make it through the day.

I immediately called her. She was at Erik’s bedside with her sister, Tammy, and grandson Austin. I grabbed my Joann Worsencroft made flannel mask and made a beeline up Pearl to Metro. They let me in because it was an end-of-life person. When I walked into Erik’s room his family surrounded him. His breathing was with long pauses between a deep breath. He was ready to move on. I read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, we prayed, and we committed him to God’s keeping. As I made the sign of the cross on Erik’s forehead, I told him that we loved him and its O.K. to move on. He did at 1:30 that afternoon.

Erik exited. Departed. One moment here. The next moment . . . where? He passed, not away, but on. Yet on to where? And in what form? To what place? In what manner? And once there, what did he see? What did he know or do? We so desire to understand.

Who in your life “just left”? When the breathing of your spouse ceased, the beating heart in your womb stopped, the beep of your grandmother’s monitor became a flat-lined tone, what happened in that moment?

And what will happen to you in yours? Barring the return of Christ, you will have one . . . a last gasp, a final pulse. Your lungs will empty, and blood will still. What will we be after we die? Answers vary.

- Nothing, some people say. We will decay and disintegrate. Death is a dead end. Our works and reputation might survive but not us.
- Ghosts perhaps? Phantoms of what we once were. Pale as a snowdrift. As structured as a morning mist. What will we be after we die?
- Or hawks. Or cows. Or a car mechanic. Reincarnation rewards or punishes us according to our behavior. We come back to earth in another mortal body.
- Or a part of the universe. Eternity absorbs us like a lake absorbs a raindrop. We return to what we were before we were what we are . . . We return to the cosmic consciousness of the universe.

All of these options are presented on the Netflix National Geographic series on God, narrated by Morgan Freeman.

Christianity, on the other hand, posits a new, startling idea. "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (I Cor 15:54). The cemetery is less a place of loss and more a place of gain. The dead in Christ are to be mourned, for sure. But they are also to be envied. Funeral dirges are understandable, but a trumpet blast would be equally appropriate.

According to the promise of the empty tomb, our friend Erik awoke in a world so wondrously better than this one that it would take God himself to convince him to return to earth.

People of the Promise hold on to the unshakable hope that hinges on the resurrection of Christ. The Christian hope depends entirely upon the assumption that Jesus Christ died a physical death, vacated an actual grave, and ascended into heaven where he, at this moment, reigns as head of the church.

The resurrection changed everything.

It was Sunday morning after the Friday execution. The sky was dark. The disciples had scattered. And the Roman executioner was wondering about breakfast or work or his next day off. But he was not wondering about the fellow he had nailed to a cross and pierced with spear. Jesus was dead and buried. Yesterday's news, right?

Wrong.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay." (Matt. 28:2—6)

Had such words never been spoken, had the body of Jesus decayed into dust in the borrowed tomb, you would not be listening to this sermon and we would not be discussing this promise. But the words were spoken, and the promise was made.

Jesus went on a resurrection tour. He appeared to the women near the tomb. He appeared to the followers in the Upper Room. He appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. He appeared to his friends on the shore of Galilee. He spoke with them. He ate with them. They touched his body; they heard his words. They were convinced this Jesus was raised from the dead. Amen.

They also believed his resurrection is the preview and promise of ours. What God did for him; he will do for us. When Jesus rose from the dead, he was the "first fruits" (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). "First fruits" is the first taste of the harvest. The farmer can anticipate the nature of the crop by sampling the first batch. We can anticipate our own resurrection by viewing the resurrection of Christ. What will happen when you die? Scripture reveals some intriguing assurances.

Your spirit will immediately enter into the presence of God. You will enjoy conscious fellowship with the Father and with those have gone before. Your body will join you later. We believe this to be true because of verses like this one. "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

When a family asks me, what happened to their loved ones, I can rightly say, "He is away from his body and at home with the Lord."

But paradise is not the final version of heaven or the ultimate expression of home.

The final age will begin when Christ returns on the final day. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout" (1 Thess. 4:16 NKJV). Before you see angels, hear trumpets, or embrace your grandparents, you will be engulfed by Jesus' voice. "The Lord will roar from on high" (Jer. 25:30). Amen.

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (1 Cor. 15:42-44)

Spirits will be reunited with bodies, resulting in a spiritual body. Just as a seed becomes a plant, we will become a spiritual body. You are going to love yours.

You've never seen yourself at your best. Even on your good days you've been subject to bacteria, viruses, weariness, and wounds. You've never known yourself as God intended. But you will! Try to imagine a body with no pain, a mind with no wandering thoughts. Envision yourself as you were meant to be: completely whole.

And while your imagination is warmed up, envision this earth as it was intended to be: completely calm. "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them" (Isa. 11:6). Lions won't snarl. Bears won't maim. No one, no thing, will rebel. The next age will be calm because it gladly defers to God.

"No longer will there be any curse" (Rev. 22:3). No more struggle with the earth. No more shame before God. No more tension between people. No more death. No more wars and no more protests. No more curse. The removal of the curse will return God's people and the universe to their intended states. Satan, the tempter, will be thrown "into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41 ESV). Amen.

In that moment "Death is swallowed up in victory" (I Cor. 15:54 NKJV).

Make this promise one of the blocks in your foundation. View death through the lens of Christ's resurrection. The grave brings sorrow, for sure. But the Bible says, "In keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

This is God's promise. He will reclaim his creation. He is a God of restoration, not destruction. He is a God of **Renewal, Redemption, Regeneration, Resurrection**. God loves to redo and restore.

"I am making everything new!" he announced (Rev. 21:5). Everything new. The old will be gone. Gone with being sedated in ICU's. Gone with being poked for blood every day. Gone with x-rays and ultrasounds. Gone with loneliness, and abuse. Gone with cancer and viruses. God will lay hold of every atom, emotion, insect, animal, and galaxy. He will reclaim every diseased body and afflicted mind. *I am making all things new. Amen.*

Can I urge, beg, and implore you to set your heart on this hope? "Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Heb. 12:28), we can have a hope that won't be shaken. Set your heart and eyes on it.

So, we do not give up. Our physical body is becoming older and weaker, but our spirit inside us is made new every day. We have small troubles for a while now, but they are helping us gain an eternal glory that is much greater than the troubles. We set our eyes not on what "we see but on what we cannot see. What we see will last only a short time, but what we cannot see will last forever. (2 Cor. 4:16—18 NCV)

In our gospel text for this Sunday, Jesus is getting some last-minute teaching in after sharing his last supper.

John 17:1-3 -- <sup>1</sup>After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

"This is eternal life." We miss Erik only for a little while until we meet again.

May the peace of God . . .

#423 – Shall We Gather at the River