

## **“God, Please Get Me Out of Here!!”**

### **Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

There was a German couple living in Buffalo, New York who were raising 2 sons and a daughter during the depression and WWII. Nine years after their third child, they were blessed with a caboose on December 27, 1949. They named him Karl.

His father was a carpenter. There is a picture of his parents sitting at a table at a “carpenter’s ball” looking like they were having a great time, 9 months before Karl was born. Karl believes he was conceived that night.

His parents weren’t much for going to church, but they made sure all 4 of their children were baptized. In grade school, Karl took it upon himself to walk down the street to St. James Episcopal Church. Before first communion instruction, he decided to join the line of people going to the front to receive the bread and wine. Much to his delight, the priest gave it to him. Now Karl was motivated to come to confirmation classes and to affirm his baptism.

At age 17, Karl graduated from Kensington H.S. and enrolled at the University of Buffalo for a time. One of the challenges was that there was this establishment called “The Inferno” where they never carded anybody and there was a girl’s school on the way there.

Karl dropped out and went to work at a variety of jobs. A restaurant dishwasher, delivering milk to the milk chutes on people’s houses, and making telephone cables and coils for Western Electric. Western Electric sent him back to the University of Buffalo by paying for his tuition and books where he earned a degree in accounting. Karl still had his wild side when in 1969, he bought a brand-new GTO, triple green convertible, 400 cubic inches, 375 horsepower that he drag raced with.

All of that would change in 1970 when he went to a dance hall called “The Mug” that had a great band playing “Chicago” music. He spotted a beautiful young woman. Their relationship began with 2 slow dances without talking. Her name was Sue.

On June 15, 1974, Karl and Sue were married at her church, Augustana Lutheran in Buffalo. Karl went to work for Union Carbide first as an accountant and then a production control foreman for the production of synthetic graphite.

Karl ended up here, where he and Sue raised their 2 children, Kristen and Derek. Karl enjoyed his last 12 years before retirement working for SGL, still in the graphite business.

But what Karl most enjoyed was hockey. Playing hockey, coaching hockey, and the enjoyment of watching his son and then his grandson play the game. Karl loved to talk about hockey.

When Karl was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer about 2 years ago, he began calling me every 2 or 3 months to meet him at Nikos for lunch. We talked about sports, what was going on at Divinity, and the latest update on his various cancer treatments.

We talked about heating our houses with wood, his enjoyment in creating crosses, boxes, and other things out of wood at the workshop in the Strongsville Rec Center.

When Karl was talking about a company that he worked for briefly, he reached over to my writing pad and wrote, “God, please get me out of here!!” On Sunday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, Jesus did come and got him out of here and into eternity. Karl’s greatest legacy is his faith in Jesus Christ and knowing that Jesus would walk with him to his eternal home.

Psalm 103:13-14 . . . As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

We are made of stardust, the scientists say – the iron in our blood; the calcium in our bones, and the chlorine in our skin forged in the furnace of ancient stars whose explosions scattered the elements across the galaxy. From the ashes grew new stars, and around one of them, a system of planets and asteroids and moons. A cluster of dust coalesced to form the earth, and life emerged from the accumulation of eight-billion-year-old deaths.

*Ashes to Ashes, dust to dust.*

In the creation story of Genesis, God shaped man out of the dust of the earth and animated him with divine breath. God placed the man in a garden by a river and taught him to tend it. When God saw that man needed a partner in this work, God created woman and together the pair learned how to be alive; to plant and prune, to laugh and make love, to crack open sticky pomegranates and dig dirt out from under their fingernails, to recognize the distinct melodies of the birds and to walk with God in the cool of the day. They lived in the shade of the Tree of Life and were naked and unashamed.

But when life was not enough, when the man and woman wanted more, they sought wisdom in the garden's only forbidden tree – the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They thought its fruit would make them like God. But in their grasping and rebellion, in their independence and greed, they instead learned fear, anger, judgment, blame, envy, and shame. When God came to walk with them in the cool of the day, they hid in the brush, afraid. So, God

banished them from the garden, away from the Tree of Life, and they understood that they would die.

“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken”, God told the man. “For dust you are and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19).

*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.*

Once a year on a Wednesday, we mix ashes with oil. We light candles and confess to one another and to God that we have sinned by what we have done and what we have left undone. We tell the truth. Then we smear the ashes on our foreheads and together acknowledge the single reality upon which every Catholic and Protestant, believer and atheist, scientist and mystic can agree: “Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return”. It’s the only thing we know for sure: we will die.

*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.*

But a long time ago, a promise was made. A prophet called Isaiah said a messenger would come to proclaim good news to the poor and brokenhearted, “to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair”. Those who once repented in dust and ashes “will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor” (Isaiah 61:3).

We could not become like God, so God became like us. God showed us how to heal instead of kill, how to mend instead of destroy, how to love instead of hate, how to live instead of long for more. When we nailed God to a tree, God forgave. And when we buried God in the ground, God got up.

The apostle Paul struggled to explain the mystery: “The first man was of the dust of the earth,” he said. “The second man is of heaven . . . just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man” (1 Corinthians 15:47-49).

We are not spared death, but the power of death has been defeated. The grip of sin has been loosed. We are invited to share the victory, to follow the path of God back to life. We have become like seeds about to transform, Paul said. “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (1 Corinthians 15:36).

*Life to death, death to life* – like seeds, like soil, like stars.

No wonder Mary Magdalene mistook the risen Jesus for a gardener. A new Tree of Life has broken through the soil and is stretching up toward the sun.

May the peace of God . . .

#608 – Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling