

Introduction

In the providence of God I was out of town this week. After hearing of Mike's death, Melissa, Ariail, and I shed tears, reminisced, and spent time in prayer. I was not privy to all the attention in Milwaukee that has been focused on Mike and the tragedy of this past week. But even up in Door County there were inescapable reminders of Mike's death and the impact of his service. I noticed Friday evening in Sister Bay that the town flag was at half-staff. Then as we returned home yesterday, we came through Sheboygan and passed the tallest flagpole in the world flying a U.S. flag. Again the flag flew from the middle of the massive pole in respect for Officer Micheal Michalski.

The Lord has spoken clearly and powerfully in the wake of Mike's death. Yet the message I am hearing from every corner testifies to what we know and what we have witnessed in this body for the last four years or so. It is a message not of death but of life—the life that is Mike's in Jesus Christ. When I received word from Pastor Groves on Wednesday night, I was shocked and saddened, but I immediately recalled a graphic memory. I recalled Mike standing on this very platform sharing his testimony before he was baptized. My sadness and shock were tempered with great confidence and rejoicing for Mike because he has gone to be with Jesus. He is with the Savior he trusted and loved and for whom he lived. Nevertheless, there is grief. And there is sorrow. And no doubt there are questions. So I want to remind us of a couple important truths this morning from the word of God. Turn with me to John 11:17-44.

[Read and pray]

A number of important and highly relevant points are present in this text this morning. I am going to impress on you three of them.

First, death is not the end for the one who follows Christ; it is just the beginning. So Jesus is talking to Martha who came out to meet him before he arrived at the family's home. She is wanting to impress upon Jesus that

if he had come sooner her brother would not have died. And Jesus is wanting Martha to see beyond the present seemingly hopeless circumstance. He makes for her this unforgettable statement: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

Death is not the end for the one who follows Christ; it is just the beginning. A reporter asked me on the phone a few days ago how I would help my congregation deal with this tragedy. I shared with her this fact. Death is not the end for followers of Christ; it is only the beginning. We do not ultimately live for the here and now but for the joy of being with Jesus. And that is life. Wednesday afternoon, Mike Michalski did not die. He was taken home to be with the Lord. This is not our sorrow. It is for this fact that we rejoice in the midst of the sorrow we experience.

I am struck by Jesus' choice of words as he spoke to Martha, especially the word whoever. "Whoever believes in me though he die, yet shall he live." I was asked by the reporter about forgiveness for the perpetrator. And I said how wonderful it would be if this man would repent of his sins and trust in Jesus. Whoever believes. What a glorious thing it would be if Mike's killer would turn to Christ in repentance and faith! How truly delightful it would be if this man would follow Jesus. What a beautiful thing to imagine a day in the new heaven and earth in which Mike and his killer would stand arm in arm before the throne of Christ worshiping him together. It is possible because whoever will believe in Christ will be there.

What about you though? Are you believing in Jesus? Have you admitted to God that you break his law and violate him? Have you believed in Jesus as savior and Lord of your life?

Second, when God does not prevent a tragedy, he has a good purpose. When God does not prevent a tragedy, he has a good purpose. I want you to again notice Martha's words in verse 21: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." But also notice verse 37. Some of the watching Jews said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" You do not understand the whole story here if you do not know that Jesus intentionally waited about coming

to Lazarus's home until he knew he had died. It was his purpose to raise him from the dead. That is why he waited. He had a good purpose.

What a horrific orchestration of events took place this past Wednesday! Here was a man who should still have been in jail but for some reason was not. And here is a man just doing his job, a man who loved even the one he was pursuing. The man who still should have been in jail killed the man who was faithfully doing his job. Were there human failures? No doubt. Was there injustice on a human scale? Absolutely. But there was no failure on God's part. The sovereign God who rules the universe did not prevent a sinful act of hostility not because he wasn't able and not because he did not care, but because he has a plan and purpose. We have the luxury of seeing that plan in the case of Lazarus. But in our lives we do not always have that luxury. In the case before us, I cannot say what God's plan is, but I can say he is working all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. I can also observe that God is using this act of wanton hostility to magnify the gospel in our city. And that no doubt is a part of God's plan. It is a good thing. So we trust him even when we do not understand.

Ariail sent this quote to me yesterday. It was written by Jim Elliott, missionary and martyr to Indians in Ecuador.

"The will of God is always a bigger thing than we bargain for, but we must believe that whatever it involves, it is good and acceptable and perfect."

Third, as a church family we need to embrace God's plan for us. This third point is basically an application of the last one. A dear brother and faithful servant of the Lord has been taken from us. Mike was a true servant in this body. He visited those needing encouragement. He transported people to church. He mentored some of the men from the MRM. He stacked chairs. He actively participated in GCF group. I do not remember him ever asking "what can I do." He just went and did. He just found roles in which to serve and he served. He was a model church member. Did you know that he worked second shift on purpose? It meant never having to miss a Sunday morning due to his job. Mike did not live to be served but lived to serve. And we as a church family need to be challenged by his example. By his example he pointed us to Christ.

Christ Jesus is the preeminent servant. He came and was numbered among the transgressors though he never transgressed. Though he kept the law of God perfectly, he was crucified as a lawbreaker. He was identified with us though he was the spotless lamb of God, and whoever will trust in him will never die.