

Second Sunday after Pentecost
Galatians 1:11-24, Luke 7:11-17

June 10, 2007
Pastor Jim Page, II

(This sermon included two movies clip from the movie 'Patch Adams')

The movie 'Patch Adams' is based on a true story of an ambitious medical school student (played by Robin Williams) who seeks to reach out to those who are dying. His favorite quote to other doctors is, "Our job is improving the quality of life, not just delaying death." He seeks to improve the quality of life with humor. In this clip, he uniquely reaches out to a man who has been repeatedly angry, hostile, and depressed about his sickness.

There are various referrals and jokes that pertain to the topic of death. It is a topic of which all of us can relate, as George Bernard Shaw claimed, "The statistics on death are quite impressive. One out of one people die." Thereby such referrals and jokes catch everyone's ear.

Tony Campolo tells about the black Baptist church he attends in Philadelphia. He opened a sermon there one Sunday by referring to the potato salad promise, "you may not think you're going to die, but you are. One of these days, they'll take you to the cemetery, drop you in a hole, throw some dirt on your face and go back to the church *and eat potato salad.*"

We often don't think about our death partly out of fear, to shun the truth, or because it's a depressing topic. Picking up the Leader-Telegram, the habit of many is to briefly glance over the obituaries to see if anyone whom they know has died..

Our human, self-sufficient nature is to keep death a comfortable distance away.

Despite our efforts to keep death at a distance, it's hard to avoid from day to day. The news overwhelms us with footage and photos of car bombs and IED's blowing up humvees, just this past week-the 79 year old Dr. Jack Kevorkian, 'Dr. Death' as he is often referred, was released from prison after serving only eight years; and the severity of a storm is measured by how many people had been killed.

With all of these references to death bombarding us from every possible angle, it's natural for us to unintentionally develop a certain complacency, a numbness, a certain regard for this episode of life that really doesn't grab our attention...unless it's on a grand scale from a tragedy or it hits close to home

As we look at this gospel reading for this morning, it would be easy for many of us to simply read over this passage similar to reading about death in the newspaper.

The gospel writer of Luke forces us to think about death...here is a woman who's already buried her husband...and is now burying her son. Her only son...there's

something about having one son...the one who would carry on the family name. This man was the strong figure in the patriarchal society.

Her precious son...she saw him crawl for the first time, comforted him when he skinned his knee, rocked him to sleep. It's just heart-wrenching to envision.

Sadly, many of us have known parents who have grieved the death of a child. And I can't fathom the amount of pain that is involved in parent's burying their child. In his book, God, Medicine, and Suffering,

Stanley Hauerwas wrote, "What is it about the suffering and death of a child that seems to challenge not only our belief in God but also our very hold on existence?"

The death of a child, that which breaks the 'circle of life' leaves the fishhook question in our hearts, 'Why'? Why them? Why so soon? A life that has not been lived to its fullest? In essence, all the funny referrals about death, like those of Patch Adams, are thrown out the window and we immediately get real. The questions, mixed with immense pain from guilt/anger/and loss...lead to a toxic drink that can shatter our faith.

Shatter our faith because the natural order of living is thrown out of whack.

The book Tuesdays with Morrie is referred to as the 'runaway bestseller that changed millions of lives'. Some of you may have already read it, to those that haven't, I strongly encourage you to do so.

It deals with a young sports reporter named Mitch Albom, and his Tuesday conversations with Morrie Schwartz, his favorite college professor who taught sociology. The Boston Globe shared Morrie's impact with the headline: A Professor's Final Course: His Own Death. The book is a journey into the dynamics of human nature as Morrie slowly fades from ALS while teaching Mitch about the dynamics of facing death while living a full life.

"So many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half-asleep, even when they're busy doing things they think are important. This is because they're chasing the wrong things. The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning."

Look back on your life...are you happy? Are you putting off things you've wanted to do because other things are taking priority? Are you happy with your relationships with those in your immediate family, extended family, those at work? What is it that God has blessed you with that gives you joy?

What do you want to be remembered by?

Many today trust in tomorrow's arrival and are the greatest procrastinators in doing those elements of living that make a life. We are led to believe that our life and our relationships will follow the natural order of events

It is often in the cemetery that tears are shed over lost opportunities.

Patch Adams, reeling with anger, had tears when one of his friends was murdered by a patient she was trying to help.

“When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, ‘Don’t cry’...two powerful words from Christ.

It is with these words that God breaks the natural order of things by ending the finality of death by ushering in life.

God doesn’t keep death at a distance...physical death, death of a relationship through anger, death of a friendship that hasn’t been nurtured...God even, like that widow, saw his only Son perish in what was an unnatural act.

God is interested in life and giving you a life of joy and hope...as the young man of Christ walked away from where he was buried.

Christ’s words, ‘Young man, I say to you, get up.’

Get up from the frustrations at work, the anger in that relationship, the impatience you have with other’s, the hectic schedule you keep, the focus on the negative things of the day.

God is in control and yearns for you to share in a life that is full of life.

We don’t know what tomorrow will bring...parents, hug your kids a little longer tonight; for you adults...call your parents...tell them you love them, thank them for all they have done for you; grandparents...pass on your wisdom and the love your parents gave you.

Be guided this week by the love of Christ...at work, at home, as you are out and about...as you read the newspaper...since it is that love overcomes death and brings purpose and meaning.

Amen.