

Pastor Roy's sermon from November 10, 2013

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God who gives us life.

We suffer when we lose loved ones to death... We grieve. We learn of tragedies and then grieve even when we do not know those involved. We miss those who have gone on before us. Parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, siblings, spouse. We find ourselves wishing we could have just one more conversation. One more hug. Experience their cooking or whatever they did that took a lifetime to perfect and now is lost to us. Pets die and we miss them.

Yet though death eventually comes to all which lives on earth, it is still a mystery. For that matter, life is a mystery. When life begins, where does it come from? We believe we come from God, but what does that mean? We can say it easily enough, but what does it mean? And how can a person be here one moment and then gone, bringing an end to a relationship and all relating until we too pass through death, uncertain of what lies on the other end?

And what *about* our own death? What exactly happens when we die? Some believe they know precisely what will happen. Some claim that the Bible tells us with a clear certainty what will happen. Did the biblical writers all have the same opinion of death and eternal life? If we pay attention, we can see a progression through the Old Testament into the New. Even in the New Testament death is treated and viewed uniquely by each writer. The same is true today, is it not?

I believe if we carefully read the Scriptures with eyes of faith, we learn to trust. We are reminded by them that the way we live our lives matters. We are reminded of hope—hope that gives meaning and courage. As the mercy and life of God fills us, it overflows to all around us. The biblical writers and saints remind us that the mercy of God which gives life also carries us beyond death. The very same meaning which fills our lives now, will continue beyond the grave.

We all have our opinions about what that will look like, just like each biblical writer. What we share is faith that the same hope which carries us along today will carry us into the full consummation of the Kingdom of life and peace in which all things are pulled together with the same unity and wholeness which has always been.

It's important to remember that faith is not about absolute certainty, but about faithful trust and rest in the One who holds this all together and accompanies us for good.

We trust in the midst of things we cannot understand so that our life is held in wonder by the One who gives it to us in the first place. What do the lessons proclaim today?

Job trusts in a redeemer who lives and whom he *will* know face to face and who *will* bring him to God. Job is not alone. Job has a friend. Job trusts.

The writer of 2 Thessalonians calls the faithful to not be alarmed or frightened by what people say about the times and what the future holds. The Day of the Lord is the day of the judgment of faith and hope. I believe we can all learn to trust, even if it is with our last breath. With that last breath we must release our life back to the One who holds it.

Though there will be tough times and many trials, the present and future holds peace from God for those who wait in faith and trust. The writer reminds us that the grace of Jesus Christ and God the Father bring eternal comfort and a sure hope. Love.

The Sadducees who didn't count on the resurrection challenged Jesus to explain the differences between life before and after death. Jesus gives two examples. He explains that there will not be marrying or the birthing of children in the life to come. In other words, the things we find so important during our lives here on earth will not be so after death. Life beyond death will be very different.

Further, he explains that physical death is an earth bound reality, and that death does not place limits on God and life. Our life is not limited by death. God relates to us as living beings, not as dying or dead beings. Does this totally make sense? No! But there is a continuity, a unity to all of creation which fills it with grace and mercy. God welcomes all of life and death is swallowed up by life. Every time. Without fail. Plants, microscopic organisms. It just is. We are granted time on earth to observe this truth and to embrace it to know that the thread of existence is bound up in the mercy of God. To be is to have amazing value. Nothing can take that from us.

Jesus tells us that there is more to life than eating, drinking, breathing and thinking. Our value does not come from our understanding but from our existence. And life is not just about me. Life is shared among all of us.

Faith is about living and throwing in our lot with the living. Jesus did not make decisions based on what was best for his personal self. He acted on behalf of all of humanity and all of creation. That was more important to him than having a family or a personal legacy. Jesus' resurrection, which we celebrate each Sunday, is death swallowed by life.

He is not here, he is alive. Is that not what we say at each funeral? We lay to rest what remains of our loved ones, but their life is not buried with the ground. Their life is free, their memory, their love is free with the Spirit of God and all of the rest of life.

God is good and worthy of our trust in all things. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Children: What does it mean to die? How do you think it feels? Do you think we need to be afraid of dying? Do you have any questions about death? What can you do when you are afraid? Can we pray?