

A Funeral Meditation
A Service of Witness to the Resurrection
John Knox Presbyterian Church - Indianapolis, Indiana
August 15, 2015

Doug Deese
December 26, 1947 - August 8, 2015

Romans 8: 31-39
John 14: 1-6, 25-27

Grief; sadness; confusion; loss - these are some of the many emotions which we bring with us today. Grief for a dear friend no longer being with us. Sadness that new memories will not be made for the future. Confusion at how someone can be here one day, and not here the next. The loss of such an important person in all of our lives.

It is true, we are grieving the loss of a strong, vibrant man who touched us all in unique ways. And yet, today is not only about our grief, our need to seek comfort from God. It is also a time for us to give thanks to God for how he has worked through one of his children to teach us the breadth and depth of his love. For in our worship of witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we affirm that God is more powerful than death, and is the giver of eternal life.

The Apostle Paul is very direct and strong-willed when it comes to eternal life. That life is ruled by Jesus Christ. There are no shootings or violent acts against innocent human beings. There are no diseases or illnesses that cannot be cured. There is no hatred or abuse or famine. The life that Christ rules is one of peace and hope. It is a life that we have been promised in his life, death, and resurrection. It is a life that is unlike anything which we can know now, but will ultimately know if we only have an inkling of faith in him.

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul reassures us of this eternal hope by exhorting the church to believe in God's boundless love for us. No matter what we may suffer through in this world, no one can separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ. "Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (8:35,37). The trials and tribulations we may go through now are nothing in comparison to how God has loved us in his Son, Jesus Christ. That is the promise, the comfort, the assurance we have as Christians that life is indeed better because God first loved us. "(Nothing) in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:39).

One of the things I often say to someone when we part ways is, "I'll see you soon." I saw Doug last Tuesday, and I certainly did not feel

that when I said, "I'll see you soon, Doug," that would be the last time I would see him on this earth.

And yet, in saying that, perhaps I was speaking the faith that Jesus shares in the reading we have heard from John's Gospel. When Jesus spoke to his disciples, he knew they were worried, scared, and uncertain about what the future held if he was not going to be with them. To ease their anxiety, Jesus assures them there is a place waiting for them in his father's kingdom. "In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? I will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." That is a great assurance to me, and I hope it is for you, as well. For in our faith in the resurrection, life does not end with the diseases we suffer from, the pain we endure, or the heartbreak we experience. Instead, eternal life is promised by the one who is "the way and the truth and the life." It is because of that faith that I know I will see and you will see Doug and so many others very, very soon, as we will meet in the many dwelling places that our Lord has prepared for us.

What is the image that you will hold onto in your hearts and minds of Doug Deese? Is it of him sharing a laugh with friends and family over something that often was at his expense? Is it of him telling stories or listening intently to others, recognizing that he valued deeply what you were saying? Is it of him showing determination following his accident to continue to live out the life of discipleship God had called him to lead, no matter the physical obstacles in his way? Is it of him showing gratitude for all that others had done for him, and then intentionally seeking to pass that gratitude on to the next person who had great need? Is it of Doug spending quality time with his family - especially his daughters, grandchildren, and his beloved wife, Kathy? Is it of him following passionately the only football team that mattered in this world, the Florida Gators?!

We are all here today because God touched us deeply through the life of Doug Deese. We each will carry with us particular memories of how God enriched our life through Doug's life. Jesus speaks of a light that shines in us, that exists in each of us, and as Jesus says, is not to be hidden, but is to "shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Our presence here today is testimony to the fact that the light of Christ shone brightly through the life of Doug Deese. And we have heard from Sara and Gary how that light touched so many people in so many different ways.

As Gary shared earlier, Doug had just retired from Wabash Valley Power five months ago, after 23 years of service there. When I saw Doug in the hospital early-last week, we talked some about retirement and what he was going to do next. And, not unlike many others at that

stage of life, he confessed to me that he really wasn't sure what he was going to do. He loved his work – it clearly was a motivational factor in his recovery from his accident, going back within two months of leaving RHI. Like many of us, our vocation is what gives us a sense of self-worth and forms our identity. Doug clearly was uncertain about what lay ahead, and that was five days before he died.

On first glance, this may seem incredibly poignant – that Doug never got to find out what that retirement journey would be like for him. But I would like to offer another perspective, one that I have been pondering quite a bit since I learned from Kathy of Doug's sudden death last Saturday.

Doug may not have been able to live out in this life his retirement years, but his gift to us in our remaining years on this earth is immeasurable. Doug loved life, and so we should honor him by loving life. Doug always had a smile on his face, seeing the good even in difficult circumstances. When we are struggling, remember Doug and see the good around you. Doug was most grateful for friendships and relationships that nurtured his life. Perhaps we are reminded, through Doug's love of us, that God wants us to relish the time we spend with one another, for it is in those moments that we are face-to-face with the living, loving God. Doug – you did have a purpose in retirement, and that was for us to live life to the fullest, and remember that we will always and forever belong to God.

We are each given a light that shines in us. That light can either be kept to ourselves, or shared with the world. There is no doubt what Doug chose to do with the light that God had given to him. Now, the question becomes: what will you do with the light God has shined on you through Doug? My prayer is that we may find it in ourselves to share that light of love. Because you never know how your light will illumine someone else's dark path, as surely Doug illumined each of our paths.

“The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore” (Psalm 121:8).

Thanks be to God. Amen.