

Death is big news. It always is. There's a lot of death in the news every night, as we hear about the latest tragedy, the latest murder, or the latest disease. Major catastrophes such as hurricanes and tornados are covered in depth every season. The casualties of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan are headlines in the papers and on the Web. If there's a major pileup on a freeway or a bus accident for a youth group that leads to death, we're sure to hear about it on the news. Yes, death is definitely big news.

Of course, as awful as it is to hear about this, for many of us, most of the time, this isn't very personal. It isn't our lives that are in danger. It may not be our relatives whose lives are on the line.

But if we have a family member who's in danger, then it's different, isn't it? If death takes away someone we love, then it becomes very personal. That's why you're here today. Death has personally impacted you. All of a sudden, death has become very personal.

Death is a very personal experience for you today because Jimmie was someone you knew. He was a husband, father, uncle, a grandfather, a great-grandfather. Maybe he was a friend of yours or perhaps a neighbor. Some of us worked with him; some of us worshiped with him. You knew him personally.

You are here today because death has become personal for you. It's personal because you have a connection with Jimmie. If you are part of his family, maybe until last week you'd never lived a day in your life without knowing he was there. If you met him as an adult, maybe today your mind goes back over cherished memories and

happier times. Whatever your connection today, because you knew Jimmie, death is very personal. That's why it hurts.

I can remember working with Jimmie when I first arrived at St Peter. A little lost as I made several mistakes as I got to know everyone here, but as a church Elder or as congregational president, I could always bend his ear. When I felt like I had made a horrible mistake, I could share whatever it was with Jimmie, and as he absorbed what the problem was, I count on his little grin and he would tell me not to worry about it, that it would work out. And it did.

When Joanne called me at 2 a.m. on Wednesday morning, I really wasn't all that shocked. I had woken up around 11 p.m. and wrote some thoughts down about Jimmie and his life and his life in Christ's church on earth. How he loved the church, how he loved his wives that had died before him and how he loved his wife that was still here; his children, grand children and so many other people, blood relatives or not, and how he was always giving and trying to make life better for those around him. I had a feeling that I would hear from Joanne that night.

If you look in my office, and a few places in my home, you'll find little scraps of paper where I jotted down sermon ideas and outlines for today. That's been going on for over a week.

Nothing seemed to fit. I kept coming back to a conversation that Joanne and I had had a few times, about how it just wasn't fair. Joanne knows this personally. After Jeanette, Jimmie's wife, passed away on December 29, 2012 and Richard, Joanne's husband passed away in April of 2013, neither one thought that they would have another mate in their lives.

But God blessed them with each other.

Their whirlwind romance was so beautiful to watch, the elder and the organist, running around like teenagers, it was so wonderful to see God blessing them both in their earthly love for each other.

It was a joy to officiate at their wedding after each came to me separately, almost shyly, asking me to marry them. It was like they were asking my permission...I wonder what they would have done if I had said no.

None of us knew that Jimmie was possibly already on borrowed time when the cancer was discovered little more than 6 months later.

We all wanted to cry out, Lord, it's not fair! They didn't have enough time.

But would there ever have been enough time? Was Jimmie your friend long enough? Father, grand father, uncle or anyone else. Are any of us ever really ready to lose a loved one?

No, because death becomes personal to us when we lose a loved one.

Going back to my conversation with Joanne, she really brought it into focus for me, and I want to share it with you.

Was it fair what Jesus did for us?

Was it fair that He died for you on the cross? Is it fair that His holy blood was shed to wash you clean from your sins?

Death was personal for Jesus too; because He died for you.

No matter how good Jimmie was to those around him, no matter how hard he tried to keep God's commands in thought, word and deed, he failed.

That's hard to hear isn't it? A man that so many of us looked up to...he was still a sinner. But not anymore.

Jimmie was washed clean in the blood of his Savior, Jesus Christ. He is not dead, but he is alive in heaven free from sin, death and the power of the devil.

He is living in victory with Jesus.

Why was Jimmie so active and devoted to his church and church family? Not because he was perfect, but because is perfectly forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ as his Savior. He supported his church; he helped other people to point them to his Savior, Jesus Christ. He wanted you to know his Savior, Jesus Christ too.

As personal as Jimmie's death is to us, death will be even more personal when you experience it for yourself. That's a sobering thought, isn't it? There's no escaping death for us. You and I had better be ready, because it isn't *if* we'll die. It's *when*.

That makes death pretty personal, doesn't it? Why does it have to be this way? It's personal because of sin. "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*" the Bible says in Rom 3:23. What does this mean in plain English? It means that not one of us is perfect, even though God created us to be perfect. It means that each one of us is accountable to our Creator, but we fail. We sin and death is the consequence of that sin.

But if I'm going to read you Romans 3:23, I can't stop there, for Romans 3:24 continues, "*and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*"

Wonderfully, gloriously, there is good news for you. Death is also a personal experience for Jesus. God didn't leave us in our sin. He sent His only Son, Jesus born of a woman, born under the law...to fulfill the law ...FOR YOU!

He personally took your sin upon Himself and was personally judged guilty in your place.

Because of that, all who trust in Jesus, who died for His people, have forgiveness and hope and peace. More than that, all who trust in him also have eternal life, for Jesus rose from the dead. Life, too, is a personal experience for those who trust in Jesus, for He gives us a promise of life that is stronger than death.

From our Epistle, Paul tells us, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:38–39)

Jesus knows the tears you’ve cried over the last few days, and He understands the emptiness that you will continue to feel at times.

He wept too when His friend Lazarus died, even knowing that He was going to raise him from the dead. He understands your sorrow. But Jesus also promises that Jimmie will rise again too.

Jesus can make that promise and back it up because He has been raised from the dead, proclaiming victory over death and the devil.

Jesus gives life to all who trust in Him, because he has been raised from the dead! Death could not and cannot stop him, because He has been raised from the dead! Jesus is life incarnate, life in the flesh!

Jesus gave that same life to Jimmie when he was baptized when he was baptized so long ago. There is no time limit or expiration date on a baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus strengthened that gift of life each time Jimmie worshiped, each time the Word of God was read and preached to him. In the Lord's Supper, Jimmie was given the body and blood of Christ for forgiveness, life, and salvation. Life eternal was Jesus' very personal gift for Jimmie.

Jesus gives this same life to all who trust in Him.

If Jimmie were here to advise me about what to preach at his funeral, that is the message that he would want me to preach.

Life and salvation in the name of Jesus Christ. Jimmie's Savior, my Savior and yours.

When you know Jesus, you know the resurrection not as a future event to come, not as a theological topic for Bible classes and sermons, but as a gift, given to you personally, from Jesus. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and He freely gives to others the life and resurrection that are found in Him.

Your life is very personal to Jesus, because He gave His life so that you might have life eternal through faith in Him as your Savior.

In a world of death, we have comfort and life. So what does this mean?

It means that just as Jimmie is alive with his Lord, awaiting the resurrection of the body, you too have the same promise.

Joanne, Jeannine, V-Bo, Becca, Greg, Terry, Kristin, as well as all of the rest of us,

Jesus will give hope and healing in the midst of your grief, in a personal and meaningful way. Read God's Word, and know that He is speaking to you.

Speak to God in prayer and know that He is listening.

Live your life on this earth, and know that your salvation is assured, because God sent His Son for you, and that His Son Jesus, died for you.

That's a personal promise from Jesus you can count on as He walks with you through the difficult days of grieving ahead of you. It's a personal promise you can count on as you go through the rest of your days. And it's a personal promise He will fulfill when He comes to gather all His people into life eternal in heaven.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.