

+ In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti + Amen.

Text: John 11:25

Theme: Resurrection

Dear family, friends, and loved ones of Merv; Nola, Jamie, Shane, and Tony; and especially you, Robyn;

Merv wanted the farm gates to always be open. It was his vocation, his passion, and his joy in this earthly life. But there are other gates. Gates that open to the dimension called heaven. Merv has passed through those gates into the presence of Him who is the resurrection and the life. Thanks be to God!

Like most farmers, entrepreneurs, or the otherwise self-employed, Merv was his own boss and the buck stopped with him. He wasn't accountable to other authorities for his farming decisions. He reaped the blessing of ventures that went well. He bore the loss of those that didn't. Typical of agriculturalists of his generation, he worked incredibly hard. And God blessed him richly. He built up his operation from nothing with consistent dedication and toil. He loved his family, was a leader in his profession, and served his community. He left a legacy that will long be remembered.

But the purpose of a Christian funeral isn't to idolize or idealize. A Christian's legacy is finally only beneficial to the extent that it points us beyond this journey to our permanent home. Life involves an accumulation of scars, failures, disappointments, and regrets. Often these are outweighed by accomplishments, blessings, privileges, and joys. But it's not always the case. Life can be hard, cruel, and unfair. We are fragile. Life is vulnerable. There are no guarantees we'll enjoy health and prosperity. But there is a promise that points us beyond.

During his lifetime Merv (like many of you here), witnessed the dramatic decline of the Christian church. Faith plays a diminishing role in people's lives. Truth about the things that ultimately matter hardly enjoys consensus or even much interest. How did the universe come to be? Why are we here? What is our purpose? What happens when mortality is reached? Is there heaven or hell, or do we just cease to exist? If heaven does exist on what basis are people received into the presence of God? Are we mostly just good enough, except for a few rotten apples? Or to use Merv's language, rotten onions?

The Bible has clear answers to these big questions. If death has the final say, where does that leave us? The Bible says this, "*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*"<sup>1</sup> In other words, if Christ did not conquer death through the cross and resurrection then sin still controls our eternal destiny. There is no forgiveness. There is no real hope. That same Scripture continues, "*If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...*"<sup>2</sup>

And there you have it, the truth that pales all others. Everything stands or falls on this truth. But truth is falling out of fashion these days. For many it's too definitive, too restricting. The current appetite is for self-definition. The appealing thing about relativizing the truth is you can construct it to suit your own opinions. You can please yourself. The risk is that relativized truth is just a grand deception. There are few things our society prizes more than the opportunity to be self-made people. But spiritually, before the Almighty, in the face of sin, death, and hell, the claim of self-definition is the grandest of illusions. We have nothing that we haven't been given. Merv has been given life in Christ. His race is finished.

But we live on and our needs haven't changed. We need forgiveness. We need underserved, unconditional, and unquestioned love. And we need it from God. Without forgiveness sin hunts us down and holds us in captivity away from God. Only Christ can rescue us from death's power.

In the 14th century, Robert Bruce of Scotland was leading his men in a battle to gain independence from England. Near the end of the conflict, the English wanted to capture Bruce to keep him from the Scottish crown. So, they put his own bloodhounds on his trail. When the bloodhounds got close, Bruce could hear their baying. His attendant said, "We are done for. The hounds are on your trail, and they will track us down." Bruce replied, "It's all right." Then he headed for a stream that flowed through the forest. He plunged in and waded upstream. When he came out on the other bank, he was in the depths of the forest. Within minutes, the hounds, tracing their master's steps, came to the bank. They went no further. The English soldiers urged them on, but the trail was broken. The stream had carried the scent away. A short time later, the crown of Scotland rested on the head of Robert Bruce.

You see, the forgiveness of Christ carries believers across the Jordan to the Promised Land. Death cannot follow. If you believe the soul of Merv Schulz has been received into eternal rest, peace, and joy by any means other than the undeserved mercy of God in Jesus Christ, then your conviction is based on something other than biblical truth. The Scripture says, "*It is by grace you have been saved, through faith- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God,- not by works, so that no one can boast.*"<sup>3</sup> The entire message of the Bible is unequivocal about this truth. It is the essence of the gospel. The holy Son of God saves sinners.

Merv was a perfectionist. Those closest to him knew that. But, of course, regarding what really matters there is no perfection this side of heaven. All are sinners. All fall short of the glory of God. Merv was no exception. Nothing we have or are can pay the price for our sins. Nothing we do can pry open the gates of heaven. An answer must be given on the day of judgment. Thanks be to God, that for believers, an answer has already been given. Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life has sacrificed Himself that our sins might be atoned for.

Up until recent years Merv was an active member of the congregation here at New Residence. Here he heard the faithfulness of God proclaimed week in and week out. Here the Holy Spirit

shaped his heart, his mind, his will, and his actions. Here he shared in God's blessings with other members of this Christian community. Here he received the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion along with the forgiveness of his sins. And, appropriately, here his remains will be laid to rest.

But, dear friends, Merv isn't here. This coffin contains only the elements that constitute his body. His soul is in the presence of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, saints, and angels. A baptized child of God, he is safe in the Saviour's arms. He is at rest. He has been released from all the limitations of this fallen life. And he enjoys a peace that we can only imagine. We do not begrudge him that rest, even though we grieve.

Grief is one of the deepest, most problematic, and complex of all human experiences. Death creates a vacuum, an emptiness, a loneliness. It's understandable this should be the case because humans are created in the image of God. And our lives are interwoven. When death rips someone away, the fabric of life is torn. The tear can't be mended by powers that we possess. God must do the mending. He gives life. And He receives the lives of believers back to Himself. Robyn, Jamie, Shane, Tony; Merv won't be replaced. His journey here is ended. May the Almighty God, for the sake of His Son- the atoner of sin, and conqueror of death- through the power of the Holy Spirit, send His light into your dark moments, may He embrace you in His love, and may He give peace to your hearts. May He strengthen your trust so that you may eagerly anticipate seeing Merv again in the glory of the resurrection. Amen.

+ In nomine Jesu +

Christian Burial of Mervyn Gordon Schulz

31 July 2020

Reverend Darrin L. Kohrt

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:17

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:19-20

<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9

