

BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
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“DEATH DOES NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD”
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Scripture: John 11:1-3, 17-27, 32-44

There is a school of thought in some Christian circles that almost views death as so much of a blessing that you are not even allowed to cry. But in the Bible, death is an enemy, and it can be a fierce one. Death is ugly. It destroys relationships. It is repulsive.

Several years ago, a friend of mine, who spoke to his brother on the phone every week had been unable to “get a hold of him.” My friend’s brother had some kind of autism, and lived in some kind of public assisted apartment building about an hour from where my friend lived. After not being able to reach his brother, my friend drove to his brother’s apartment, opened the door only to find his brother dead on the floor. He had been lying there about a week. I got the call to go down and as I sat with my friend, he turned to me and said, “Death is ugly.”

And so it is. There’s no getting around it. Death breaks up families. People miss these loved ones who have gone ahead of them. Death is odious. We can’t pretend otherwise. But death does not have the last word!!! And we can thank God for that.

We can thank God for our Savior who promises, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”

We are called to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and ...fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith...” This is the Only Way!

In an age of war, famine, natural disasters like hurricanes, volcanos, epidemics, genocide, God offers us the faith that can move mountains—it's the “counter-testimony” to all manner of evil, brokenness, strife and the claims of the devil.

As we see in the Gospel this morning, God steadfastly refuses to allow death the final word. For “the resurrection and the life” enters into our suffering, into the world that God so loves!!! And God Himself makes it clear that death is ugly, repulsive and it is the enemy.

Mary, Martha and Lazarus had been some of Jesus' best friends. It is believed that Jesus spent much time at their home, even after Lazarus was raised from the dead: eating, drinking, and relaxing. It was a place where Jesus was accepted. It was, for Jesus, “a home away from home.”

When Jesus saw His dear friend, Mary of Bethany, crying “and the Jews who had come were crying also, he was deeply disturbed and troubled. He asked, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They replied, ‘Lord, come and see.’” And we are told in what has been referred to as the shortest verse in the Bible that Jesus “began to cry,” or “Jesus wept.”

Jesus weeps for the death of Lazarus and for the pain of those who loved him. And Jesus weeps with us when we are mourning, hurting and sad. Death is the enemy. Death is ugly. Death was not the original intent. And death does not have the final say!!

Because of the Fall of humankind, death entered our world, but because of Jesus Christ and His love for us—where we are originally from and where we are headed—is the same: it is God.

Hear these words again from Revelation 21:1-6a.

There is a vision of “a new heaven and a new earth.” The “holy city” comes “down out of heaven from God.” It's a vision of the Church at

the end of time...which is really only the beginning. And because it is eternal, it is present and available to us now.

Remember, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Because of the vision we are given in Revelation 21, we are able to be lifted out of our everyday lives to a heavenly realm where we can view earthly existence from heaven's perspective. We can be put in a position of suddenly seeing our own day to day lives from God's point of view. And when we see this or get a glimpse of it, it transforms our understanding of our own reality.

How puny do some of the things we stress over seem when we view them through the lens of Revelation 21? We get so stressed about the things of this world...trying to get rich...competing with our neighbors...forsaking our families and church for the almighty buck and the American dream...when all this stuff is just a flash in the pan.

There is a heaven and it is eternal. There is a God who loves us beyond all imagination!! You and I will literally be the "Bride of Christ." And while on this earth, we are to be getting ready for that wedding day; going out to the street corners inviting all who will come so that the Lord's House will be full!

What could possibly be more important? This should put things in perspective and enable us to get our priorities straight. We should be excited with an urgency to share the love of God in Jesus Christ with those who don't know Him. We should be eager to share our resources in order to help bring other human beings into the Kingdom!! How eager are we?

Listen to these words of hope and promise, "I heard a loud voice from the throne say, 'Look God's dwelling is here with humankind. He will

dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Jesus is the “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.”

The vision of the “heavenly Jerusalem” in Revelation 21 shows God and human beings dwelling together, just as we did before the Fall. It’s no surprise then, that the description of that new city includes a garden with the tree of life, which is endlessly fruitful, with leaves that heal the nations.

A little girl was taking a walk with her father. She looked up at the stars and exclaimed: “Oh, Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is this beautiful, what must the right side of heaven be like?”

As Christians, as those who have decided to follow Jesus, we have a hope and a future. And in many ways, that future is now!! Because, before we lie down to die, Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. God has defeated death by Jesus’ work on the Cross.

In the midst of our sorrow and grief over those who have gone before us—we are called to live as though the eternal is now. May we live as though death has no power over our lives. May we live as though we belong, in life and in death, to the God who loves us and is always with us: in good times and bad.

Death is an enemy. Death is ugly. But because of Jesus, death does not have the last word!! Thank God for the Savior who is “the resurrection and the life.”

Amen.