

3-22-21 DEVOTIONAL: Death and Resurrection ...

How great to see more and more people coming back to church and hear that more and more people have had their vaccines!! You have no idea how bizarre it was to worship in an empty sanctuary for so much of the last year and to see you all coming back is incredible! Thank you for being so cooperative about the TORNADO DRILL we had after church – DANNY MOSS YOU ROCK!

Yesterday we began the transition to HOLY WEEK as we talked about Mark Chapter 12 ... I've been thinking a *lot* about the resurrection, heaven and what we imagine the afterlife will be ([Mark 12:18-27](#)), but EASTER is just days away so death and resurrection is probably on ALL our minds! I was really intrigued when I read a story about a well-known pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, Timothy Keller, who wrote a book called, simply, *On Death*, based on hundreds of hospice counseling experiences he had.

But last year, amid the Covid pandemic, Keller learned he has pancreatic cancer, and he has just written an essay in *The Atlantic* about having to confront his *own* death. He wrote: "I spent a few harrowing minutes looking online at the dire survival statistics for pancreatic cancer and caught a glimpse of *On Death* on a table nearby. I didn't dare open it to read what I'd written."

Keller, in other words, discovered he was, if not a death *denier*, at least someone who, despite his deep roots in Protestant Christianity was initially unwilling to imagine that he could be dying at age 70! Facing his own death was a profound struggle for him: "One of the first things I learned was that religious faith does *not* automatically provide solace in times of crisis. A belief in God and an afterlife does not become spontaneously comforting and existentially strengthening."

WOW, this made me stop and think! What Keller was confronting was an "ASH WEDNESDAY" moment ... a moment we *each* must confront the reality of death. And as Keller's experience shows, just being a Christian doesn't mean that our first reaction to news of our impending death will fill us with blissful anticipation of heaven!

But wait!! What about that JOY we first experienced when we *committed* ourselves to Jesus Christ? Didn't we understand our eternal salvation was through *Him*?

Let's remind ourselves what we KNOW ...

In the Book of Revelation, Jesus gives John a vision ... he sees "a new heaven and a new earth" as a final creative, loving and redemptive act of God! HE IS OUR GOD!

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. Revelation 21:4

Do you know what this means? Death is defeated! And at almost every graveside service I read these words:

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' I Corinthians 15:51-55

I love this text because the apostle Paul acknowledges that our mortal bodies will "put on immortality" and when that happens? That's when we can revel in the **victory** over death that God has achieved for us!

As the death and resurrection of Christ draws near, we have no choice but to accept that we won't *really* know what heaven is like 'til we get there! But let us never, ever forget WHY it means **everything** to us ...

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16