

Buried and Raised with Christ

At the Funeral Gary Merritt – 01/31/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Romans 6:1-11 Pastor Keith Besel

- ✘ Mary Ann, Trent, and Cindi; as well as the rest of you in Gary's family; his brothers and your families; his grandchildren whom he loved so much; his in-laws, cousins and close friends – we all know why we are here this morning, because a few weeks ago someone very near and dear to us left this earthly life to enter into the loving arms of His eternal Savior Jesus.
 - ➔ Still, let's just be honest with each other, it's tough; it's hard; because a crucial part of our own lives has been taken from us. We often use other words and phrases to kind of soften the reality of what we are facing here today, saying things like, "he passed away" or "I lost my husband, dad, grandpa, brother, or friend." But the reality is that we are here today, not because our beloved Gary is "lost", but because he has "died."
 - ➔ And death – well...death stinks, doesn't it? If Gary were here to respond to that question, I know he'd say in his own unique way, "Well...yeah!"
- ✘ And why does Gary's death hurt so much? Because...all the things that we came to love so much about Gary will no longer be ours to enjoy firsthand.
 - ➔ As Mary Ann said, Gary was "charming, funny, selfless and generous." He was a great "teammate" in life even as he was "exasperatingly a procrastinator."
 - ➔ For you, Trent, you considered your Dad to be your "hero and best friend; a shoulder to lean on and always easy to talk to." That was one of the special gifts that God gave to many of us here in Gary – I know it was for me. I will always remember the many wonderful conversations I had with him, usually in those times when it was just the two of us together, since he was generally a bit more reserved in a group of people. A number of you here in this room have told me the same thing about how much you loved to visit with Gary one on one at a coffee shop or out in the fellowship hall, etc.
 - ➔ And Cindi, you highlighted the adventurous and humorous side of your Dad that you said you didn't necessarily appreciate like you should have when you were young, but now you already miss greatly. It sounds like those times you all had with Gary on the many family camping trips – apparently often with flat tires, and even a "burned pair of glasses" involved were quite the hoot, as you look back on them.
- ✘ And I'm just curious, how many in this room have one of Gary's homemade pens, pencils or woodworking item now as a memento? I've got a pen & pencil set that I carry with me almost every single day.
 - ➔ Yes, there are a lot of wonderful things to remember; to thank God for in connection to our beloved brother Gary; things that we are blessed to cherish even at the same time that we grieve because, as we said before, Gary now has died.
- ✘ But, my dear people, as harsh as that word "death" is ... for Gary, I want you all to know without any shadow of a doubt, that even as we are here with his earthly remains before us, death no longer has any power over Gary!
 - ➔ In fact, the apostle Paul tells us that this death, that brings us here for this service, was not even Gary's first death! Did you know that?
- ✘ Paul tells us this in Romans 6:1-11 (printed on pg. 5 in bulletin), ¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized

into His death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death He died He died to sin, once for all, but the life He lives He lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

→ As Mary Ann and I talked, we agreed that this text in Scripture is a perfect description of God’s miraculous work in Gary, both during his time here on earth and right now for Gary in Paradise.

✘ Just like the rest of us, Gary’s first life – that is his life here on earth, was one dominated by the many temptations and struggles with sin. As Paul said earlier in Romans 3:23, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” I know, our world tries hard to avoid that word “sin”, but as Paul says here, if you “fall short” of the perfect “glory of God” – in other words unless you are perfect in every way, then the fact is, you “have sinned.”

→ And I can guarantee it, from many of my conversations with Gary that he would be quick to agree with that. Again, I can both see and hear him say, “Well...yeah!”

✘ But especially in the last eight or so years of his life, I can also see and hear him quickly agree – now with his signature smile and his wide, eager eyes, that in Jesus – because of His sacrifice on the cross for Gary and all of the rest of us, that he and all of his sin had been buried with Jesus when Jesus was buried in the tomb outside of Jerusalem. As Paul says, it is at our baptism, that Jesus connects us all to His own death on the cross where He paid for and then buried the consequences of our lives of sin with Himself in the grave.

→ And I can say with complete confidence that Gary not only believed that to be true with all of his heart, it brought him tremendous joy and peace deep into the furthest recesses of his soul. It was a noticeable relief; a weight off of Gary’s shoulders to know, as Paul says in verse six, “that our old self (i.e. our sin-filled self before Christ) was crucified with Him...so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” That burden of knowing that we can never adequately pay for all of the times that we have disobeyed against God; those bonds have been cut away in Jesus.

✘ And here’s where not only Gary’s great joy and peace came from, but yours and mine as well. Verses 8-9, “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.” Why? Because “we know,” Paul says, “that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over Him.”

→ In fact, 1 Corinthians 15 (55&57) backs this up, saying, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” “...thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” That’s it, the reason that Gary was at such peace even when he knew that his second, earthly death was so close, because he knew Jesus had conquered death for him too! Gary knew that this earthly life, was not the end-all; not his ultimate goal – even as much as he loved and cherished all of you and his time with you as his family and friends.

✘ You see, Gary had already tasted of the first resurrection at His baptism. You could just see it in his eyes, especially when he sat here in worship and when he knelt here at this rail to be fed by Jesus with the same body and same blood that Jesus gave and shed on the cross to forgive every one of his sins and to cover Him with Jesus’ own righteousness for eternal life.

- Just three days before Gary died, I was blessed to be with him and Mary Ann and Trent and Cindi in his living room for Gary to receive the Lord's Supper one last time here on earth. And I told Gary how much I cherished administering Christ's body and blood to him, because every single time I did it for the last eight or so years since His confirmation ... every single time I could just see so prominently in his eyes and his body language his joy and eagerness to receive that gift of life.
- And then, only moments later, even though he could no longer lift his hand, the same eagerness was obvious to all of us there with him. In fact, though it makes me chuckle now to remember it, Gary was so eager to feed on Jesus that last time, that when we tried to just give him the smallest crumb of the body because he wasn't really able to swallow food anymore, Gary told Mary Ann with a firm whisper, "give it all to me."
- ✘ Friends, that's what Gary has now, isn't it? He's got all of Jesus! Paul said in verse 11, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." In baptism, that was Gary's reality even while he was with us here on earth. But now, just as Jesus promised the thief next to Him on the cross, when he came to, and confessed his faith to Jesus there, "Today, you will be with Me in Paradise" (Lk. 23:43).
- Right now, though Gary's death really "stinks" for us; while we are struggling without him here, Gary is in the arms of Jesus in Paradise, today! And as Revelation (7 & 21) tells us, his pain and suffering, his struggles to walk and breathe – all of it is gone for Gary ... forever!
- ✘ His joy is so much greater than anything either he or the rest of us could ever imagine here on earth, even more than the joy he had when he got to take a ride in the F105 fighter jet like he used to work on in the Air Force.
- As God promises in the Old Testament Reading that I read earlier from Isaiah 40:31, which I shared with Gary one of the last times I visited him in the hospital, "but they who wait for the LORD," that is those who believe and trust only in Him as Savior, "shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." That freedom of spirit ... that is Gary's reality right now with Jesus.
- ✘ So Mary Ann, Trent, and Cindi, I pray that knowing that your beloved husband and dad is at peace with Jesus right now will bring you peace and comfort even as you struggle with the tears of grief at this time. And I pray for all of you, that you too might have the same peace and the same confidence that our brother Gary enjoyed in Jesus as well. Amen.