

A Message of Hope - Rev. Ron Lively
Robert Martin Anderson
Memorial Service – Middle TN State Veterans Cemetery
December 26, 2023; 2 pm

Opening Prayer

I have been asked by Mary Francis and the family to offer a message of hope as we place to rest the body of Robert Martin Anderson while we celebrate the passing of Bob's soul from his earthly tent.

I understand there will be a Celebration of Life for Bob at a later date when there will be fond memories shared – memories that will carry on his legacy. Bob was a faithful spouse and family man. He loved his family and church. He was a jokester, a banjo player and more. Bob retired twice after 41 years of work, mainly for Westinghouse. He loved the Lord's Prayer and Psalms 23.

Our focus in this brief time is to acknowledge Bob's faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. My decision is to look specifically at the Heart of Christ – not so much at who Christ was and what He did though those are very important. This being the day after Christmas, we are still celebrating His birth and will soon once again celebrate His resurrection and ascension.

The Puritan writer, Thomas Goodwin wrote that Christ's "own joy, comfort, happiness, and glory are increased and enlarged byWHAT? Let's ponder on that for a few minutes. What gives Jesus joy?

Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus is the Founder and Perfecter of Our Faith. It reads, **12** *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

One true answer could be that Jesus rejoices when his disciples (i.e., all believers) forsake all to follow Him (Mark 10). Or the answer could be when believers' faithfulness in a little prepares them to be faithful over much (Matt 25). We know Christ rejoices in the salvation of the lost (non-believers in Him and His work and Lordship). How about when the Father reveals divine truths to the childlike rather than the intellectually impressive (Luke 10)? We know that it pleases Christ when we listen to Him and obey Him.

But what if it were true that Christ's heart and joy involves the failures – hurts and needs of sinners and sufferers? What does that look like? If true, how does that affect our personal relationship with Christ through His Spirit living in us?

Goodwin completes his sentence: Christ's "own joy, comfort, happiness, and glory are increased and enlarged by his showing grace and mercy, in pardoning, relieving, and comforting us - his members here on earth."

This is our message of Hope – Jesus own heart was best described in one single verse in the 89 chapters of the four gospels. He said in Matthew 11:29, "I am gentle and lowly". Another word for gentle is meek and another word for lowly is humble. So, gentle and lowly / meek and humble.

Gentle is a big adjective. He has open arms NOT a pointed finger. He is the most understanding person in the universe. He loves to help the needy. He is a Shepherd who cares for his flock, his children, followers. He guarantees He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the Promise Keeper, not us.

Lowly is a word to describe one of humble estate. James 4:6 says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Paul tells us to associate with the lowly, the unimpressive, and the needy.

Read Matthew 11:23-27. Verses 11:28-30 reads: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The truth is there is no yoke and there is no burden. What Christ offers is rest and peace.

We all know when our physical bodies need rest. That is extremely important. But how do we know when our souls need rest? We find rest when God is present – when we have a close intimate relationship with Jesus and Holy Spirit.

Our biggest problem is that when we are given something, especially His grace, say His forgiveness, we feel obligated to pay for what we receive. But when Jesus offered himself as the one-time sacrifice on the cross to cleanse us, not of the filth of our bodies but of our moral sins to become righteous as He is righteous, there is no burden. There is no yoke. Salvation, as Bob knew, is a gift. Jesus said, “Come to Me”. He must offer the invitation.

But for those He chooses, He expects a response. We have to come to Him – to open ourselves up to Him and to be teachable like a child. The qualification is that we “labor and are heavy laden (burdened)”.

The good news is that we do not have to unburden ourselves to “Go to Jesus”. Personally, I am loved and offered forgiveness Just As I Am!

A yoke is what a pair of oxen wears over their shoulders in order to pull a heavy load in the fields. God’s yoke is kind and his burden is light. The irony is that, God’s yoke is a non-yoke, and His burden is a non-burden. What helium does to a balloon, Jesus’ yoke does to his followers. He fills us up. We’re moved when filled up or inspired by His Spirit. We are carried along in life by his endless gentleness and supremely accessible lowliness. He doesn’t simply meet us at our place of need; he lives in our place of need. He never tires of sweeping us into his tender embrace. It is his very heart. And he wants our hearts. He wants us.

Death isn’t our enemy. Life, as Bob’s spirit now knows for certain, goes on into eternity. Believers in our Lord’s work on the cross, in His redemption, do not fear death. We certainly grieve our loss of a loved one but the death of another gives us all a chance to gain a perspective of our own mortality / our own death that is sure to come one day. It can happen on any day which means we have to be ready, prepared – saved.

Saved from living eternity without Christ. Most people seem to forget why we need salvation.

The family wishes to be sure you have the assurance of your salvation – the forgiveness of your sinful state inherited from Adam and Eve and the awareness of the great love of Jesus in our lives now on earth and with him in eternity. Listen for His call to “Come to Me”. Become a Disciple which was once the name of all Christians. My encouragement is to get the training to become not just a disciple but a disciple-making disciple. Seek to fulfill the Great Commission that Jesus left us in Matthew 28. We have the privilege of fulfilling a greater purpose than simply living life as it comes with the ups and downs, the disappointments, the losses, etc.

Christ is the Head of the Church, His Body. We are the Body of Christ and He gets joy in helping His Body (in helping us as the members of His Body – of Himself) with our needs as well as with our failures. If we fail to ask Him for His Healing, for His help, then His Body (He himself) suffers. Christ Jesus gets joy in offering us, His children, help and forgiveness and love even before we can ask sometimes.

Francis, I know you know these truths and that you will continue to ask Jesus, Your Lord and Savior for his ongoing help, his ongoing blessings. Give our Lord joy by asking Him for Himself, His presence, His provision, His joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

In closing,

The Lord's Prayer

⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷ “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.^[a]
10 Your kingdom come,
your will be done,^[b]
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread,^[c]
12 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.^[d]

Closing Prayer

The LORD Is My Shepherd

A Psalm of David.

23 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.^[a]
3 He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness^[b]
for his name's sake.
4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,^[c]
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
6 Surely^[d] goodness and mercy^[e] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell^[f] in the house of the LORD
forever.^[g]