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## Sermon to comfort the bereaved family

I don't usually make funeral sermons. I, however, am posting this with the permission and encouragement of Janice, mother of Brian. Brian was forty-three years old when he died and survived by his parents and two brothers. John 14:1-6 "What God creates God loves, and what God loves God eternally loves." I hope you will listen carefully to these words, cling them, and let them sink deeply into your life and in your heart. Let them echo this day and bring you in the next. I'm the thread that goes through everything I'm gonna tell you. They're talking about Brian and you. If there is something that overcomes us and sees us through death is love, a "strong love of death". "What God creates God loves, and what God loves God eternally loves." Those words were true to Brian before he died and they're true to him today. They were true for you before Brian died, they are true for you today, and they will be true for you tomorrow. While I believe the truth of those words and the strength of God's love I also know that these words do not take away pain, dry tears, or answer questions we bring today. I think we're here today with two main questions. Our first question is the same as Thomas asks in the Gospel of today (John 14:1-6). "How can we know the way?" How can a parent survive your son, a parent who survives his boyfriend, maybe he knows the way? We can't. How can we know the way a friend or loved friend dies and life gives us what we never asked or wanted? How can we know how death crushes our world and nothing makes sense? We can't. We don't. As difficult as this first question is, there is another one, I think many of us have a second question today. Some of you may have asked him out loud and others may have struggled with it silently. Why didn't you tell us? Why didn't you tell us he was sick? Whygave us the opportunity to be there, to help, to lovethrough this? I don't think that's a question we're asking Brian, but a question we're asking. It is a question that comes from a deep and profound pain, a pain that makes us wonder or believe, "I should have known. I should have seen something. I should have taken something he said. If only I knew I could do something. I would have said that or done this. I could have made a difference." I've been thinking a lot about this second question. I didn't have the privilege of knowing Brian, but in the last few weeks I heard stories about him, I learned what it was like, and he gained more information about how he died and what happened. As I did, I realized Brian had made a decision. It was intentional about how it would go. It wasn't planned. He had something in his mind and heart. Janice, I gained even more clarity on this when you told me that you all had chosen John 14 for the Gospel of today, that story about the many rooms in the Father's house and Jesus' promises to prepare a place for us and to be with us in that place. What I came to believe and understand is that Brian was not depriving anyone of anything. He did not deprive you of helping and loving him for all this; This was his way of helping and loving you for all this. You were the one in his mind and heart. He was saying, "I know the way. I'm already well." Brian chose a room in the Father's house over a bed in a hospital. Now it is someone who knows the way, someone who is well within himself, someone who knows the many rooms of the Father's house: rooms of life, healing, light, love; rooms of hope, mercy and forgiveness; rooms of beauty and generosity. Brian knew what Thomas and we don't. He knew the way and knew he was fine. Grief hid it from us, but not from Brian. Brian did that. It was his way of loving you and reassure you. Maybe would be the wayfor ourselves or would choose for Brian, but it was his way and we need to trust and honor him. When I say that Brian did this, I don't mean that Brian made his way in that old song Frank Sinatra. The way of Brian, from all I can see, was founded in his love for you, founded in the eternal love of God, founded in the promises of Christ, and founded in the awareness that his life was renewed every day even while his body was dying. We who remain can appoint the day or perhaps even the hour of his death. Brian, however, never knew the moment of his death. It simply passed from this life to the next life. He knew the way. You have to trust me and work with me on what I'll say later. It won't look true, but it is. Brian's love, his life and his presence are so real today as before he died. I know it doesn't look like that and it certainly doesn't feel like that. I know your pain and tears say it's not true. But I promise it is. It is the evangelical truth. His love, his life and his presence are today different but equally real. This means that we must learn to listen, to see and speak differently. It means we have to listen with the ears of our heart. We must listen to his voice when it seems that silence is all we hear. We must believe that his voice has never become silent. In a few minutes we will arrive in that place in the prayers in which we say that we are "uniting our voices to the Angels, to the Archangels, and to the whole company of heaven". "All the company of heaven." This means Brian's voice and the voices of all those we love who are dead. Their voices and voices become one voice that offers praise and thanks to God who creates and gives life, the God who renews and heals life, the God whose love surpasses death. So when we getthat place in the liturgy slow down, open the ears of your heart, and listen. Listen to Brian's voice. It is there with the Angels, andand the whole company of heaven. We must be willing to see more than we think. We must be willing to let ourselves be surprised. we must look for the presence of brian in new and different ways. we must keep the eyes of our open heart — because you never know when a cove might appear. finally tells the stories of brian and speaks his name. tells stories about how his life has intersected yours. tell the joys and laughter, pains and losses, successes and failures. say how, as I read on facebook, brian could in one breath bless you and in the next cuss you. Tell the ways he touched your life and made a difference. never stop telling stories. These stories are not simply words, they create and recall the presence. So, when you tell the stories of brian don't talk so much with your lips but with your heart. These stories are not just a memory of past events, a recitation of history. I'm the endless story of brian's life. nothing of all this will end the pain you have today and will not melt what happened. I know. Instead, it renews our hope and trust that there is a way out even when we cannot know the way, even when we do not see it, and even when we do not believe. You see, life is too sacred and the love of God and the love of brian are too strong, because death has the final word. life has changed, it's not over, and that is why on this day, "even at the grave, we make our song; alleluia, alleluia, alleluia". This week I went to the tomb for a young woman who struggled with a lot of hard things in this life. as I gave his mother a hug, I whispered in my ear: "It's safe. I know it's safe." This mom had many difficult days and sleepless nights during her daughter's life when she didn't have that confidence. but while they put his bodyin the ground, he was considering something solid true — that his daughter's soul is now nowhouse with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8), where he is safe in his care. Grasping for the truth This is not the first time I was around suffering people and I felt them repeat something like this — a statement or an idea they had taken in possession to try to make sense of their loss or find comfort in the midst of loss. I've heard people say things like: "It was too good for this world," and "Death was the only way to finally find peace", and "I believe that God needed him more than we are here." And, of course, we often say and feel, "It is in a better place." When we are moving away from the loss of someone we love, we seek something solid to grasp to find stability in a storm of sadness and clarity in a sea of confusion. Some of the things we take hold of are deeply true and therefore try to stop us in the storm. But some of the things that we hold emanate from the vacuous spirituality and the superficial convictions of our modern culture, instead of the solid truth of the word of God. They may look beautiful, but they're just not true. Or, maybe more often, they're only partly real. Some of the very spiritual things that we say to ourselves, or listen to others tell us, in the midst of pain they have no scriptural basis, or even contradict Scripture. C.S. Lewis wrote in the Christianity of Mere, "Comfort is the only thing you can't get looking for. If you are looking for the truth, then you can find comfort. If you look for comfort, you will neither get comfort nor truth — only soft soap and desirable thought to begin and, in the end, despair." So, while we look for something to grasp in the midst of pain that will bring comfort, or as we look for words to tell someone else who is distressed, we want to make sure that what we are grasping of, or offering someone else to keep up, isfully, and eternally true. six words: "I can trust God with this" thisThis week, I asked myself, what are those deeply and eternally true things that we can grasp in the midst of pain that will serve as yet for the soul, when the winds and waves of pain are coming over the bow and threatening to break down for good? I think the answer is essentially something that has many iterations or implications, which is: "I can trust God with this." Recently I wrote a whole book about what to say to hurt people, because when we talk about pain people, our words are really important. But when we are those who are sorrowful, what is much more important than what others tell us is what we say to ourselves — what we say to ourselves among the pits, when we have more questions than answers, when the vacuum feels overwhelming, when the anger is getting a foot in our heart. When the pain is fresh and intense, we could take wild ideas for a driving test, but to go towards healing and return to joy requires that we press this only idea deeply into our souls until it begins to strike us at the level of our feelings: "I can trust God with this." "I can trust God with this" has all kinds of implications that bring peace in the midst of chaotic thoughts and the emotions of pain. It means: I can trust God with the time of the death of my beloved. I can trust God with the way my beloved died. I can trust God with strangers in my future. I can trust God with my unresponsive questions until faith becomes seen. I can trust God to heal pain. I can trust God to fill the void. I can trust God to light this darkness. I can trust God to return joy to my life. I can trust God to speak to me through his word. I can trust God to provide a sufficient grace and advine to face whatever happens. I can trust God because this works together for my good and for the good of others affected by this, to conform more closely to the image of Christ. I can trust God that the day of resurrection isand it will be worth all the waiting. Although, or perhaps especially if, we are not sure if the person who died has been genuinely united with Christ by faith, we can say: I can trust God knows who belongs to him. even if I don't know if my beloved belongs to him. I can trust God will do what is right, even if I don't know what God will do. I can put my trust in a God who is merciful and loves to save, even if I don't know if my beloved trusted in that mercy or took possession of that salvation. Talk to your thoughts When the pain of life seemed to rage his dependence on God, he wrote the psalmist, my tears were my food day and night, while they tell me all day, "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:3) His agonizing emotions spoke to him, suggesting that God had abandoned him, so he challenged that voice rather than believe it. He faced what he was told, rather than letting him determine his perspective. The psalmist filed his complaint to God, but he intentionally spoke to his soul both in an interrogative and educational tone: Why are you thrown down, or my soul, and why are you in tumult inside me? Hope in God; for I will praise him again, my salvation and my God. (Psalm 42:5) Rather than listening to his desperate thoughts, he spoke truth to his thoughts. Rather than trusting his feelings, he challenged them. Rather than talking about the truth of the gospel as something out there for other people, he applied it personally to himself. Praying to God, he preached hope to himself. That's what we have to do in the midst of our tears. That's what my friend did this week in the midst of her tears. When I whispered in my ear, "I know it's safe", he basically said: "I can trust God with this. I can trust God to keep her safe." Answer of the question Death of a parent (or any family member) mayreally tax on a Christian. Even when what we lost is a believer, it is never easyfarewell, especially if the mourning was sudden. The awareness for our loved ones is appropriate and awaiting; Christ Himself cried in the tomb of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). The Bible provides consolation, and we as Christians can find comfort even in the loss of someone so dear to us. In the loss of a Christian parent, the greatest comfort a believer has is the hope and trust that our relationship with our parents does not end to death. A Christian who has lost a Christian parent can rest in the promise that there will be a meeting in heaven. Our parent is currently with Christ, living His joy (2 Corinthians 5:8). At the time of resurrection, all those who have accepted Christ will be glorified and given incorruptible bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-44; John 11:25). For the Christian, Christ conquered death! As Paul willingly writes in 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, "Death was swallowed in victory!" Where, or death, is your victory? Where, or death, is your stinger? The puncture of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thank God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Losing a parent can be more difficult if we are uncertain about the salvation of our parent. But we can still cling to God's promises and look for it for comfort. We look forward to the time when all things will be made new and we trust that He is right and good. The God of the Bible delights in comforting the afflicted and healing of the broken heart (Jeremiah 17:14; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 7:6). He is "a father to the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5). When we are sorrowed by the loss of our loved ones, God is quick to offer us his peace. In the midst of our mourning, we can know the presence of God with us; even in our pain we can approach him in prayer and adoration. As believers, we too must not suffer alone. We've gotin the Body of Christ that will help to bear weight, to share pain and to "move with those who cry" (Romans (Romans)The loss of our parents can be deeply painful, especially since they play such an important role in the modeling of our lives. In fact, our parents are often those who comfort us when we are suffering, and to lose them they can feel like we are losing our emotional support. But Christians can take the heart that we find comfort in more than our families; the God himself of Creation, who knows us better than ourselves, understands our pain and is anxious to grow and heal and give us his peace. Back to: Family and parent questions How can a believer find comfort after the death of a parent? parent?

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