

June 21, 2002 by Steve Brandon



Funeral Sermon for Theresa Garden

John 14:1-6

I was with the Garden family last Sunday evening, after Theresa had been rushed to St. Anthony's hospital in an ambulance. The emergency room doctor came in and spoke to us about Theresa. He began to speak to us, "As you probably guessed, things didn't go well...." He then went on to describe how Theresa was transported to the hospital by ambulance. He described how CPR was performed, how an I. V. was started, and how some medicines were given to help. He told us that when she arrived at the hospital, it had been 25 minutes with little or no heartbeat. He said compassionately, "As I am sure you know, the outcome of 25 minutes with little or no heartbeat is not encouraging. The chance of survival is not very good. In fact, it is zero percent. When she arrived at the hospital, I pronounced her D. O. A. I am sorry for the bad news." He then asked if there were any questions.

Alec, her son, replied, "But Doctor, things did go well. She went to heaven to be forever with the Lord. For she died faithful in Christ."

This is why we gather this afternoon and can rejoice. Though many of us have known and loved Theresa Garden and will miss her, we need to rejoice in the fact that she died "faithful in Christ." This is the only reason that we can rejoice today: her faith and hope was in Jesus, alone, to save her. It wasn't in her good works. It wasn't in her church attendance. It wasn't in her prayers. It wasn't in her good nature. It wasn't in the children she has raised. Rather, her faith and hope was in Jesus' death upon the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

Sure, we struggle today with how Theresa was taken from us. We wrestle with questions of why God would take Theresa at age 53 from her husband of almost 28 years and her five children and her extended family, whom she loved greatly. Furthermore, I cannot help to think with the Kishwaukee Bible Church family. Remember, it was a little over a year ago, when we heard of breast cancer in three of the women attending our church (the others are present among us right now). We wonder why it was Theresa and not one of the other two women. Quite frankly, we also must wonder why God has continued to sustain us this far.

This is why funerals are so good for us. I spoke with the family before Theresa's casket was closed the words of Solomon, "It is better to go to a house mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man and the living takes it to heart" (Ecc. 7:2). This afternoon we need to "take it to heart." None of us are immortal. There will be a day when people will gather, not to think about the life of Theresa Garden, but to think about your life. I would like for us this afternoon to "take it to heart."

Will it be said of you, that "things did go well." Will it be said of you that "you went to heaven to be forever with the Lord. For you died faithful in Christ." This is how Theresa Garden left this earth. Will you leave it the same way that Theresa did?

In the past few months, as Theresa continued to grow weaker and weaker, she would often request that the Bible on tape cassette be played for her to hear. She especially loved listening to the Psalms and portions from John 13-17. In fact, Alec told me that he read almost all of the New Testament to her in the last week of her life (with the exception of 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Revelation). It was what she wanted to hear.

This afternoon, I would like to direct our thoughts to Jesus' words found in John 14. Jesus spoke these words on the evening before He was to be murdered by crucifixion to a Roman cross. He spoke these words to His disciples to prepare them for the events which would follow. He said, ...

"Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Before he was to depart from the disciples, Jesus told them that He would not abandon them. Rather, He left them for a reason. He had to leave them. He had to go. Years before, it was prophesied that Jesus would be rejected, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone" (Ps. 118:22). Jesus had to be rejected to be established as the Messiah, who could forgive sins. "This is the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes" (Ps. 118:23). It is marvelous in our eyes that Jesus would come and be rejected, so as to save those who would believe in Him.

Jesus didn't abandon His disciples. Likewise, He has not abandoned those who believe in Him. This afternoon we can rejoice that Jesus has not abandoned us. Be comforted that Jesus didn't abandon Theresa. He said that He would "go to prepare a place" for His disciples. Theresa has simply come to enjoy the place that Jesus has made for her. She is enjoying it right now.

In John 14, this is what Jesus was telling His disciples. He was saying to them, "Though I go and die, and things look bleak, and your heart is troubled, don't let your heart be troubled." He has gone to prepare a place for those who would believe in Him. From that time on, everyone who has come to trust in Him, alone, has been or will be taken to the same place to enjoy Jesus, forever. The catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." In this we can be comforted.

In verse 3, Jesus said, "that where I am, there you may be also." Jesus has not abandoned us. Jesus has not ever abandoned us. Jesus will not ever abandon us. In this we have hope. "Where I am, there you may be also" (verse 3).

In recent months, I have heard a question floating around, through various preachers I have listened to, "If you got to heaven,

- and experienced all of its beauty (streets of gold, pearly gates),
- and experienced the redemption of the body (i.e. no more sin),
- and were re-united with the every believer of all time,

If you got to heaven and experienced all of this, but Jesus wasn't there. How would you feel about being in heaven?" Now, we know that such a situation is impossible. You read descriptions of heaven, and you realize that ...

- the Lamb of God, Jesus Himself, is in the center of it.
- There is no temple, because the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple (Rev. 21:22).
- It is the Lamb that gives light to the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:23).
- Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev. 22:13).
- The whole purpose of Jesus' life was for others to behold His glory as He prayed, "I desire that they whom You have given Me may be with Me where I am that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me" (John 17:24).

So, we know that heaven without Jesus is impossible. But, here is what the question does. It removes what ought to be your focus of hope and your treasure of joy. And replaces it with what might be your focus and treasure. We could ask the question differently, "Is Jesus your treasure above all other things?" Those who will be with Jesus are those who treasure Him today. Jesus said, "Where I am, there you may be also" (verse 3).

How do we get to be with Jesus forever? Not everybody will be with Jesus forever. He once said, "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom" (Matt. 7:21). Despite great works of righteousness, Jesus will declare to them, "Depart from Me" (Matt. 7:23). So, it is a fair question. How do we get to be with Jesus forever?

Jesus continued in John 14, ...

"And you know the way where I am going." Thomas *said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus *said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:4-6).

Notice that Jesus' claim is exclusive. He said that there is one path to be with Jesus. There may be "many roads that lead to Rome." But there is only one path that leads to Jesus. We heard earlier in the service that Theresa was a faithful advisor to many of you. Many listened to her wisdom with dealing with children and with home schooling. If you listened to Theresa, will you listen to Jesus this afternoon? I trust that much of the advice that Theresa gave was good advice and worthy to be trusted. Yet, I would much more trust the advice of Jesus. Will you?

How do we get to be with Jesus forever? Ready for something profound? "The path to Jesus is Jesus!" Think about this. He is talking to His disciples. He tells them that He is going to prepare a place for the disciples, that the disciples might be with Jesus, "where I am, there you may be also." Then, when asked, "How do we know the way?" Jesus replies, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." You want to be with Jesus forever? Here are the directions, "Go down Jesus Street, until you hit Jesus boulevard and turn right. In a few miles, you will hit Jesus road. Turn left. After the third stop sign, turn right on Jesus court."

This is the only path. You don't get to Jesus through Confucius or Mohammed. You don't get to Jesus through church attendance or good works. You don't get to Jesus by spiritually uplifting thoughts, or positive mental outlook, or by believing in yourself. Rather, you get to Jesus through Jesus, by believing in His work on the cross.

You need to realize that your biggest problem in life is your sin before a holy God. You may think that your biggest problem in your life right now is your financial problems. You may think that your biggest problem in life is your marriage difficulties or your wayward son. None of these problems can compare with your sin before a holy God. The Bible says that God's eyes are too pure to look at evil (Hab. 1:13). All of your mistakes, your failures, your dirty words, your evil thoughts, your wicked attitudes, and your bad deeds, all of them form a barrier between you and God. You need to be cleansed before you can be in God's presence.

For instance, suppose you attempted to enter into an airport terminal with a machine gun strapped around your shoulder. The people in security will not let you pass the security counter (if they are doing their job). You need first to get rid of your machine gun before you can ever get to the airport terminal. Your sin is similar. You cannot enter God's presence with unresolved sin. The good news of the gospel is that sins can be cleansed in the blood of Jesus through simple faith in Him. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Perhaps this afternoon, you don't see your sin before a holy God as the biggest problem in your life. Perhaps you don't consider your sin to be too big. Well, consider these words of Scripture, "whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). Your sin, however small it may appear to you is infinite when you consider the infinite purity of God. Perhaps you are trusting in something else. You might like Jesus, but you like other things as well (i.e. the good that you have done, your meditation, or other spiritual activities).

Jesus said that there is one way, one truth, and one life. "No one comes to the Father, but through Me." Trust in Jesus. He alone is your only

hope. He was the hope and trust of Theresa. He is the hope and trust of many of us in this room.

This message is for all of us! There are three churches represented here this morning, Bethany Community Church, Kishwaukee Bible Church, and Rock Valley Bible Church. We need to hear this message. For those of you who believe this, we can reflect again upon this glorious news and rejoice. Sins can be forgiven through simple faith and trust in Jesus. It is too good to be true! But it is true! The hymn-writer said it very well. "My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part, but the whole, was nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O, my soul!"

When the day comes when you are rushed to the hospital in an ambulance. Will you die "faithful in Christ"?

This message was delivered at Bethany Community Church on June 21, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.