

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, January 7, 2025
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“I’m Going to Die – Sort of”

READING: John 11:21-27 – “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

This will be my last Weekly Devotion for a while. On Thursday this week I’ll undergo open-heart surgery at Baptist Floyd. Going to get that leaky mitral valve fixed. I’m not looking forward to it, but I am looking forward to getting it behind me. Seems I’ve heard it said that once you get a valve-job done on your car, it should be good for another 100,000 miles or so. I’m hoping the same is true for me.

It occurred to me a few weeks ago that in order to repair that valve the surgeon and his team will have to stop my heart from beating. He can’t really work on the valve if it is flapping open and closed 60 or 70 times a minute. That’s a little disconcerting – my heart’s been beating steadily now for some 71 years. It may have skipped a beat here or there, but it has been very dependable up until now. So if they will stop my heart from beating, I’m going to die on Thursday – sort of. Oh, they’ll have me hooked up to the by-pass machine that will circulate and oxygenate my blood to keep my body and soul together during the surgery. And, when all is fixed and sutured and ready to go, they’ll shock my heart to restore the beating. If all goes according to plan, I’ll wake up and go on from there. Still, it is a little daunting when I think it through.

How like the bigger picture of our life, death, and resurrection this all is. There will come that day, hopefully some years off, when I will take my last breath upon this earth. Something will still my heart with finality and my earthly life will end. What then? I’ve been asked about this many times over the years. “Pastor, when we die do we immediately awake in heaven or does our soul ‘sleep’ until the Resurrection?” My answer is always, “Yes!” The Scriptures are a little vague on this subject. Actually, they answer much like I do. In places Jesus gives the impression that it’s an immediate transport to glory. He told the thief in the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” In the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus he indicates that both men died and were immediately aware of their afterlife.

But the Scriptures also use the term “in the sleep of death” and when Jesus came to raise Jairus’ daughter, he told the crowd, “She’s only sleeping.” Here’s the scoop: it doesn’t matter which scenario is the case. Look, when they give me the anesthetic, I will be unconscious of the passing of time. My next conscious thought will be a nurse talking to me as I come out of

my slumber. If you've had anesthesia before, you know what I'm talking about. You have no sense of time having passed while you were out. Everything goes black and then here you are! So whether we immediately become aware of heaven the moment death takes us, or if our soul "sleeps" until the moment of resurrection, the very next thing we will be conscious of will be the glory of the Lord and the place he has already prepared for us. A thousand earthly years could pass while the Lord holds our souls "at rest" but the moment he says, "Come out!" we'll arise with a brand-new forever body and the realization of all of our hopes in Christ Jesus. Literally and finally life out of death!

So, I'll be dead on Thursday – sort of. My heart will be stopped, Dr. Pagni and his team will do what they do so well. And, when it's all done, I'll come to in new circumstances. Someday death will truly come for me, and I'll be dead – sort of. Sort of – because I have a promise in Christ Jesus that death does not have the power to hold me forever. No, Jesus suffered his death on that cross just to make sure that death will not be able to have the final victory. Because my faith is in him death will lose. He will say to me, "Come out!" and I will live. And so will you! We just celebrated his first coming with an eye on his second coming. In that day, whether our souls have been "asleep" or have already been rejoicing in his presence, the Holy Spirit "...will raise up me and all the dead and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true." Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1) Be good to Pastor Woods while I'm laid up. He'll be taking the Thursday Saints Bible Class and the Eighth-Grade confirmation class. He'll be preaching every Sunday, doing all the hospital calls, and anything else that comes along. Pray for me, but also pray for him. This will be a little dress rehearsal for the vacancy my retirement will bring. I'll get back in the saddle just as soon as I can. Until then, "God bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord look upon you with his favor and grant you his peace." Amen.