

Rest Unto Your Souls
Matthew 11: 28-30
Don Lincoln

Last year I shared a reflection from a friend in my pastors' group – Blair Monie – who had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at 68. Here's another reflection of his from a year later.

So what am I learning? I'm learning, once again, that God is good. I'm learning the question, "Why me?" makes no sense at all. Why not me? Why should I think these things happen to "other people," but not me? I'm learning every experience can teach us something important about life. I'm learning, as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it well, "That I belong--body and soul, in life and in death--not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ."

Blair Monie joined the Church Triumphant on Tuesday. In response to one of my pastor colleagues, who said she would be calling out Blair's name today in her congregation, I added the open opportunity in OUR litany so I could call out Blair's name before God today.

But also so I could call out the name of my mother, because that wasn't going to happen anywhere else today. My mom died 5 weeks ago. The countless thoughtful emails, cards, notes, encouraging words and knowing looks I've received have been a blessing.

Some comments may have revealed more how the writer felt about having experienced such a death. One said, "When you lose your mom, you feel like an orphan." Not sure that's how I feel – but the intimacy of the thought is lovely to have shared with me. Another said, "When you lose your mom, you lose a part of yourself." Not sure about that one either.....but maybe that's just me.

I've only seen my mom a couple times a year for a few days each time, for the last 40 years. We haven't lived in the same state; didn't do Sunday dinners together like so many of you have the privilege of doing. A year ago I spent a week with her in the hospital, when she was so ravaged by illness she pleaded with God to take her home. She never really recovered from that illness. Her death was a gentle and peaceful passing to witness, a release, a completion, a fulfillment after 90 glorious years of running her race faithfully.

But I'm not my dad. In their 67 years of marriage there might have been a dozen days total when my mother and father were not together – probably half of that being one

week when Dad went canoeing with me in Canada! Never mind she was his beloved – the change in his daily life is beyond compare.

Every death is different. Different in when and how it happens. And each recipient of such loss experiences it differently. Ninety years of age isn't the same as 68 – and doesn't compare to an unexpected death in your twenties, or surviving only two days following birth. And as different as those deaths are, multiply the differences a hundredfold in how they are experienced by the individual lives they touch. Every death is different.

But every death is also the same. For each person has died to this life only – to be made alive in Christ. Whether 48 hours; 22 years, 68 years or 90 years – each has died to THIS life only – to be made alive in Christ.

In that, **EVERY death is the same**. We declare the same for every one – death does not have the last word. Death does not play the last card. Our God has the final say, and because of that Jesus says:

“Come unto me all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

Some had turned the law, in which the Psalmist delights, into a heavy yoke, a burdensome, commandment-laden weight. Jesus recaptured the original meaning of God's invitation to relationship – a different yoke, which, because it comes out of God's mercy and out of God's love, is easy to bear.

Easy doesn't mean free from care. It is not an invitation to a life of ease, or the rest of inactivity. Remember, following Jesus is not easy – turning the other cheek; forgiving enemies, suffering for righteousness sake. Jesus offers not a vacation from the law, but a different way of living it.¹

For when we are partnered with Christ – which is what the yoke describes as Jesus uses it – like two oxen harnessed together – when a yoke fits well it is easy for them to pull. When you and I are yoked, in league with, connected to Jesus, we find in Him a foundation that is secure. A confidence that is established on the promise that in life AND in death we belong to God; and that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Him we find Resurrection is true; and because of that good news, even the most restless soul can find its rest and peace.

The love of God, shown in Jesus Christ, is our load-lightening truth. The weight of the heart; the burden of the conscience; the fear of one's unacceptable self in its worst form – all is forgiven, all is shown mercy, all are loved and held close, all to be resurrected with all the saints by the power of Christ.

Every death is different. Trust me. I miss my mom. I get tender when we sing hymns like My Shepherd Will Supply My Need – because it was my mom who taught me to sing. And that was the hymn playing when she breathed her last. But every death is the same – and my burden is light – because I know the One to whom she belongs; the one to whom you and I belong; and I shall see her again.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.

1. Douglas Hare, Interpretation Commentary on Matthew 11: 28-30.