

A Service Celebrating the Life of James B. Cooney, III

Good Morning. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Thank you all for your presence this morning as we celebrate Joe's life.

Hear God's Promises:

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Know that the lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever. (Ps 100)

I am the resurrection and the life; all who believe in me, though they die, yet shall they live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

We gather here this morning in the protective shelter of God's healing love to celebrate a life well lived and ended much too soon. As much as we celebrate Joe's life though, we have tears to shed, grief and anger to express. In the midst whatever you feel, know that God is ok with your expressions, and know that God cares. We gather here as God's people, to comfort and support each other in our loss. We gather to hear words of hope. And we gather to commend to God with thanksgiving the life of James B. Cooney, III, knowing that we belong to Christ who is Lord of both the dead and of the living.

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal God, let your presence rest upon us as we give thanks for Jim's well-lived time on earth. We're here because we love him and miss him; we want to cherish our memories of him. We want to honor him, and support each other as we grieve his passing – a passing from life here with us to everlasting life with you, O Lord. You formed James, knew him, walked with him through all his years, and even now we have confidence that he is in your presence. In the midst of the loss we feel right now, and in the weeks and months ahead, grace us with your comfort and mercy as we remember and share fondly what he was to us. May we find courage to continue facing the changes that life brings to us as we go on from here. In your mighty name we pray. amen

Scripture

Psalms 150:1-5

- 1 Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.
- 2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.
- 3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,
- 4 praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe,
- 5 praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.

John 14: selected verses

¹"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God^[a]; trust also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going."

¹¹Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. ¹²I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.

¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—¹⁷the Spirit of truth. ¹⁹Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

²⁵"All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

MESSAGE

Death comes through many doors. For some it slips through the door marked "merciful healer" and liberates a person from pain, illness, a worn-out body. In these cases it's easy to see how death fits normally into the circle of life.

Then there are those times when death bursts through the door marked "Obscene Intruder." It comes as a vicious thief and robs the victim and his family of health and happiness and much of the abundant life Jesus taught us was God's intention. These deaths make no sense. They frustrated our attempts to find easy answers when hurting people ask why, and these are the circumstances that we gather in this morning as we pay respect to Joe's life.

There are no easy answers to sudden tragedy. No one knows why a vibrant young man in perfect health at the age of 54 can be enjoying a leisurely Sunday with his wife in one moment and then gone in the next. Although we may not get answers to our specific questions, we can gain some hope by looking at how others have managed their grief and sorrow in the midst of similar times.

I think that's one of the reasons why we have the book of Job, a book that tells the story of the extreme suffering of one who had been faithful to his God. At the beginning of the story, we read of an extremely wealthy man in every sense of the word. He owned lots of property. He had a large and happy family. He enjoyed the respect of his peers. But in a very short period of time, he discovered that every one of those things he valued most was taken away from him. He lost everything he owned through theft or calamity. He lost his children when a tornado hit his house, and finally his own health deteriorated nearly to the point of death. Here's a picture of human suffering in its most graphic form.

What did Job do? I think a lot of his responses can give us hope as we begin to cope with our own loss. Job's first reaction was NUMB SHOCK. He sat in silence for three days – when his friends came to console him, he was at a complete loss for words. His losses were so great he could barely take them in.

I imagine you each responded to the jaw dropping news of Joe's death in some similar way. There's so much within us that just doesn't want to accept the reality of what we're hearing. This haze of numbness shields our bodies and minds from the punch of such traumatic news, but it doesn't last forever. Sooner or later it begins to set in. That's what happened to Job and he felt utterly hopeless. Job cursed the day he was born. Life no longer had meaning for him. He saw no future left for him. So much of his familiar world had died, and part of him had died as well.

Thankfully – these feelings won't last forever either. Somehow we realize that life goes on – and somehow we must go on too.

Then Job has a period of remembering the past. He goes back in time and remembers the good days when his children were with him, when he had no worries about the future, when he was well respected in the community. The first positive thoughts since he lost everything are starting to break through his depression. Sudden loss – at some point in our journey to a changed life – makes us realize the good we had, the times we laughed, the memories we still have and will carry with us. We can begin to give thanks for and celebrate what we had.

We can let the past teach us to be grateful for the good things we've been blessed with. But we can't live in the past.

Another stage Job passes through – a stage I love to read about because of the permission it gives us – is a period of Anger and resentment. Job got REALLY mad. He was looking for someone to blame. And his feelings – his bitterness was intensified by his friends. They were intent of finding a simple solution to Jobs complex problems. Under the guise of comforting him, they even tried to blame him. “Hey – you must have done something wrong, buddy to deserve all this!” Job knew he was a good and upstanding person and instead blamed God, saying that the whole scheme of things was way out of whack. Job shook his fist at God in anger and frustration. I love

that vision because it reminds us that we too can yell at God, can shake our fists and rant and rage at this loss we can't even begin to wrap our minds around.

We live in an imperfect world; we live in a world of choice and we live in a world where too many things happen that aren't what our God intends. We live in a world when we too often ask 'why?' I can't answer why that stupid bee showed up last Sunday. I can't answer why a life was lost so suddenly and far too soon. But what we are promised in scripture is that God IS with us. God was there in the midst of those last moments of Jim's life; weeping yet right there holding him in his everlasting arms of grace and love and peace; just as God is with each one of you carrying you through this journey of grief and loss.

And we are promised that God can do all things for good of those who love him. What that good could possibly be is pretty dang hard to see right now, Jesus said that "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart – I have come to overcome death. I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." Sudden death, unexplainable tragedy, intense sorrow, unbearable pain do not have the last word! Jesus does!

And so, with clashing cymbals and clanging gongs, with guitars and drums and all music – let's celebrate our loving God who created our friend, our love, our son and our dad and who has welcomed him into life eternal where all will one day be reunited with those they've loved and lost.

Stairway to heaven – Riley Tulley – 16 yo.

WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession Let us pray. O God, our strength and our redeemer, giver of life and conqueror of death, you have given us new and living hope in Jesus Christ. We thank you that by dying, Christ destroyed the power of death, and by rising from the grave opened the way to eternal life. We praise you for your steadfast love for Charles all the days of his life. We thank you for all that he was to those who loved him. We thank you that all sickness and sorrow are ended, that death itself is past, and that he has entered the home where all your people gather in peace. Help us to know that because he lives, we too live, that neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come shall separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord who taught us all to pray

THE LORD'S PRAYER (in unison)

Let us join together in saying the Lord's Prayer

Commendation

Into your hands o merciful savior, we commend your servant. Acknowledge, we humbly pray, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, and a son of your own redeeming. Receive him

into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the company of the saints in light. Eternal God, who breathed into lifeless dust and brought forth Adam and Eve in your image, we return to the earth the lifeless ashes of James B. Cooney III, earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes, believing that as you raised Jesus Christ from death, you will breathe life into us again so that we may live with you forever and ever. Amen.

And now, may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God almighty, the Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit remain with you always.

Amen.

Our worship has ended.