

John 14:1-6

Funeral of Herb Pakrul

January 7, 2017 - "Wait For Me"

- the more I've read and listened and watched, the more I am convinced that Herb Pakrul and my dad had many things in common
 - both were about as born Lutheran as you can be
 - both came from a long line of Lutherans before them
 - both grew up on a farm
- both were called to war ... both left their beloved fiancée behind with the prayer and the plea, "wait for me"
 - your mom ... and my mom ... both waited for their beloved to come home again ... and they did
- Frieda told me that story the other day and asked that somehow I work it into the sermon today, and as I thought about it, it became a natural fit for the title this afternoon ... "Wait for me"
 - seventy some years ago, Herb did ask, and Frieda did wait
- and after the war, Herb and Frieda were married at St. Peter's in Port Colborne in November of 1945 ... 71 years ago
 - and they were blessed to live together for all those years, all but the last few months when the frailty of age brought Herb into nursing care
- in those early years their catch phrase and prayer and plea was always the same ... "wait for me"
- when Frieda shared that with me, it struck a chord and reminded me of my own parents ... their 71st anniversary would have been next Tuesday, January 10th
 - they had to wait a little longer because my dad came home wounded ... but that's a story for another day

- those words, “wait for me” did something else too
 - they reminded me of one of Jesus' promises to his disciples
- you heard that promise this afternoon
 - Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms” ... I promise
 - he said, “I am going there to prepare a place for you” ... I ...
 - he said, “I will come back” ... I promise
 - he said, “I will take you to be with me” ... I promise

- Jesus also said something else
 - built and based on the foundation of those promises he could say, don’t be troubled after I’m gone
 - don’t doubt that I will come back
 - don’t worry about the way to follow me to eternal life
 - I am the way ... and the truth ... and the life
 - I am the fulfilment of the promises of God

- did you know that there are two different kinds of waiting?
 - there is a waiting that is built on fear and doubt
 - it is characterized by worry and sleeplessness
 - you pace and you fret
 - your mind races and you get caught up in every worst case imaginable
 - you get ulcers and grow more and more frantic by the minute as you assume the worst has happened

 - but there is also a waiting that is built on faith
 - it is characterized by a calmness of heart and mind that goes beyond our understanding

-St. Paul talks about that kind of peace in Philippians 4 when he says, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

- when our faith in the promises of God enables us to wait in faith, we are blessed with that peace which surpasses all understanding
- its source is found in the cross of Christ and power is in the empty tomb of Easter morning
- in John 13, the disciples were truly filled with fear and dread
 - they were worried and troubled to the core of their being
 - it was a dark day ... the cross wasn't months away
 - it wasn't weeks away or even days away
 - this was holy Thursday
 - they were in the upper room
 - and the cross was hours away
 - before noon tomorrow there would be fear and betrayal
 - there would be denial and doubt
 - there would be confusion and consternation
 - by the end of the day there would be death ... and burial ... and sadness
- Jesus knew that so he wanted to give them something that would get them through those dark hours
 - that's important because what Jesus said to them can help us get through these dark hours

- in both cases, the help comes in the form of a promise
 - “Wait for me” Jesus said to the 12
- same promise comes from the angel in Acts 1 after Jesus had ascended into heaven ... this Jesus whom you have seen ascend into heaven will come back in the same way you saw him leave
- the same promise comes again at the end of revelation ... behold I am coming soon
- it comes in Matthew 24 ... and in Luke ... and in Mark ...
- time and time again Jesus says, “I will come back ... wait for me”

- in John 14, Jesus starts his conversation with his disciples with these words, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled”
 - Good Friday was the very next day
 - they would desert him and run away
 - they would be overcome by sorrow and sadness
 - then he would rise from the dead and show himself to them
 - they would be glad and rejoice
 - but then he would ascend to his father in heaven and the sadness would return

- so before that day came, Jesus took the time to prepare them
 - he did it because he loved them
 - he did it because the whole reason and purpose of all that he did was so that they would and could follow him one day

- what he offers them *and us* is not just wishful thinking or empty platitudes
- he gives us clear reason for the peace that we can have
 - I am going to prepare a place for you
 - I will come again to take you to myself
 - you will be with me forever

- Jesus wanted to let them know that even though they would not see him any longer, that he was near
 - that he was with them
 - that he was beside them at all times
- I want you to see God's love and care for you today
 - I want you to see the love of God through your sadness and your sorrow
- Herb was in his 95th year when the Lord called him home
 - in his weakness and old age, it was a day he waited for with eager anticipation ... he wanted to go home
 - he had his share of aches and pains and growing weakness
- 95 years has a way of showing you the ups and downs of life this side of heaven
 - it can also teach you an important truth about God
 - God is faithful, he keeps his promises
- not too many days ago, Diane and David called me to tell me that Herb was back in the hospital and not doing well
 - the family as gathered and the nurses and staff were working to keep him comfortable
 - he was partly awake and partly asleep but he was listening and he would squeeze your hand or open his eyes or say a word or two
 - we read some scripture from the Christmas story
 - the story of Simeon in the temple, the one who was first to say or sing, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to your word"
 - holding the infant Saviour in his arms, he said, "My eyes have seen your salvation ..."

- we said a prayer and prayed the Lord's Prayer together
 - we asked God to give him healing if that was His will
 - or to take him home, if that was His will
 - and over the coming few short days we waited
 - and Jesus came ... and took him home
- so, today we are thankful, not just that his pain and weakness are over
 - but that he is with his Lord and Saviour

- in spite of Herb's sickness and weakness and frail body, the Lord gave him to you for a very long time
 - now the Lord has blessed his with a peaceful death and you with the comfort of his promise of a blessed reunion in heaven for all who trust in Christ Jesus

- Herb was a gift of God's love for you
 - he was an example of faith and humble dependence on God in all things
 - and we thank God for him today

- we are here today because our Lord invited us to come
 - “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest”
 - “Cast all your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you, he will not let the righteous fall”

- it never ceases to puzzle me that the God of the universe would want to embrace us and give us comfort and peace
- what have we ever done that God should love us?
 - by nature we are not his friends
 - we are not beautiful
 - we are not holy ... we are sinners
 - we would stand guilty before him

- yet he loves us and claims us as his own
 - God takes our sins and puts them on Jesus on the cross
 - he buries them in the tomb and gives us free and full forgiveness
- Jesus loves you so much that he went to the cross to pay for your sins
 - he died for them
 - he broke the power of death
 - he did it for you and for me and for Herb
- God marked Herb as his own in Baptism
 - in Romans 6, St. Paul writes, “all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death”
 - “we were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”
- there’s a promise that goes with that ... “if we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection”
 - “now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”
- Scripture tells us that baptism gives us new life
 - it makes us children of God
 - it washes away sin and covers us with Christ’s perfectness
 - it puts us under grace
- baptism affects our past, our present and our future
 - it erases our past and takes away our sin
 - it gives us peace and new life now
 - it gives us power to overcome our sinful nature and live for Christ
 - it gives us a future and a treasure in heaven that will not rot or rust or fade

- in John 14, Jesus was preparing to leave his disciples
 - before he left he needed to prepare them
 - he needed to tell them how they could follow him to heaven
- Thomas, one of the 12, was worried
 - they were all worried, but Thomas had to open his mouth
 - Lord, how can we follow you? We don't know the way

- in answer, Jesus said one of the most important sentences in Scripture
 - “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.”

- the common religious belief of many people today is that we are all going to the same place, we merely travel different roads
 - Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu ... it doesn't matter
 - that's what people think
 - but that's not what the Bible says

- the Bible tells us that Jesus stands apart from all the others
 - he makes this claim: “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.”
- what makes this claim unique is clear
 - every other religion relies on a certain level of good deeds to meet the qualifications for eternal life
 - you want heaven?
 - you want eternal life?
 - earn it ... work for it ... get your life in order
 - get yourself cleaned up ... do good works ...
 - on and on the list grows to the extent that if you were to take it seriously, you would have to conclude that no one could ever get to heaven by their own good deeds

- and if you are doing all those good deeds to get yourself to heaven, then they are stained and corrupted with selfishness
- and you are no better than the worst of sinners
 - you have built your life on “what’s in it for me”

- our Christian faith says something very different
 - first of all ... we know that no one is good enough
 - we know that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
 - you can never earn your way to heaven
 - that’s the bad news ... and it’s no surprise
 - the good news is nothing short of amazing
 - by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works ...

- if salvation could be gained through the Law, Christ died for nothing
 - we need Jesus
 - we need the cross and the empty tomb
- all of God’s promises are yes in Christ?
 - Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is the guarantee of eternal life for all who die in faith in him

- Jesus could make the promise in John 14 because he would break the power of sin and death and rise from the grave
 - he could make that promise because death could not hold him
 - the grave was really empty on Easter morning
 - death had been swallowed up in victory

- there is a reason why your hearts don’t have to be filled with fear and doubt
 - you don’t have to let your heart be troubled

- the promise of forgiveness, life and salvation is for you today
 - the promise of a blessed reunion in heaven for all who die in Jesus is for you today too

- Jesus said, “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.”

- God’s promise means eternal life for you if you but put your trust in Jesus
- his promise means confidence for the day of judgement because Jesus has carried our punishment in our place
- his promise means no fear, because perfect love casts out fear

- the fear of death is gone, because death, the last enemy, has been destroyed
 - its power and its sting have been removed
 - Jesus broke the power of death when he rose from the dead

- it is Jesus’ death and resurrection that brings comfort to us this day as we cling to the blessed hope of heaven through the cross and through the empty tomb

- Jesus has prepared the place and he has prepared the way, both for Herb and for you and me, if we but trust him who freely takes away our sin
 - we know it because Jesus has promised it. Amen