

AT PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS
Rom. 5 & John 20; Daniel Vandever Funeral; January 13, 2022

Since Daniel died his family members have expressed the hope that he is now, finally, at peace. That is understandable when we take into consideration that his life these last number of years had been anything but peaceful. The last several months included a series of life-threatening health crises that eventually ended in Dan's death. Likely, the most devastating event in his life was the premature death of his beloved wife, Tina. Until Dan met Tina he had moved from one thing to another in his life. When he met Tina he realized he had met the love of his life.

It is not hard to imagine the hopes and dreams they had. God blessed them with a son together, Dustyn, and I'm sure that they talked about him growing up, and maybe the day they would be grandparents. All that was shattered when Dustyn was only nine months old and Tina died. A child needs a mother and a father, but Dan had to take on the responsibility of raising their son without her. By all accounts he was a wonderful father who raised a wonderful son.

When life gives us death to deal with, especially when that death is so untimely, it can't but bring questions about God and His love for us. If God is good, what good can He be working when He allows a young wife with an infant son to die? That is a troubling question. Tina's death shattered whatever peace Dan had in his life. Yes, he picked himself up and went on because he had to, but he continued to struggle through life. He always lived his life to its fullest, but he continued to face setbacks, some out of his control but others because of some bad choices he made. I don't think anyone would describe the life he had as a peaceful one. Now Dan has died.

One of the blessings of being Christians is that, even though our lives might include very little earthly peace, there is a peace that surpasses all understanding that cannot be taken from us. God's peace in Jesus Christ is not like earthly peace. Earthly peace is temporary and transitory; it comes and it goes, and there is no avoiding the violence of death that each of us must face.

Death for us is not a question of “if” but “when.” We can either try to live our lives to fullest and then die – which is actually depressing – or we can live our lives in faith in God and be blessed with God’s peace in our lives now, peace when we die, and the peace that continues into eternal life. I think that Dan struggled through his life with very little of God’s peace, as seen by his resistance to going to church and his choice to live his life mostly apart from the Church.

What I am not saying is that Dan died without faith in God. He was given faith in God by God the Holy Spirit. God washed away his sins in Holy Baptism and claimed Dan as His own child, promising that He would never leave him or forsake him. True faith is a gift from God not something we choose or work ourselves. True faith never trusts in how good we are, but honestly realizes that we are failures, sinners destined to struggle through life and suffer the consequences of our sins. If there is any hope for peace and life beyond this life, it does not depend on how good we are, but on how good and faithful God is to us.

All three of the Scriptures I chose for today, from Isaiah, Romans, and John, state that there is peace for those with faith in God. I was told that Dan did not like complicated or showy things in his life, but liked things kept simple, so I will keep things simple today. Dan’s peace with God does not depend on anything he was able to accomplish in his life, but only on what God worked through Jesus Christ. And the good news is that the peace that God worked in Jesus was given to Dan and applied to Dan in his life.

God’s final verdict of Dan’s life is not based on his death we mourn today because of his sin, but on the death of God’s own Son who died with no sins of His own but carried all Dan’s sin to His cross. Jesus died with Dan’s sin and rose from the dead so Dan could die to sin and rise with Jesus to live forever in God’s peace. And if we are going to have any lasting peace, peace with God, then our relationship with God must be based on this truth. It’s as simple as that.

All of God’s Word agrees with this. Any religion that lifts up what we can do for God to be acceptable to Him and have peace with Him is not the Christian religion. And if we think we get to decide what it means to have peace with God, we are in for a frightful surprise.

So what is Dan's hope to have peace with God? It must be peace with God through Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel Reading from John 20 took place on the first night of Easter, the day Jesus rose from the dead, and then again a week later when "Doubting Thomas" was with the rest of the disciples. Both times Jesus appeared He had the same message: **"Peace be with you."** The peace that Jesus declared to them depended on two basic facts: first, Jesus had died to save them from sin and death and, second, that Jesus had risen from the dead to give them life. The death and resurrection of Jesus is not just a sad story with a happy ending, but the foundation of Christian faith and peace with God.

If we want peace with God in this life we will want to be where Jesus comes to His believers, where we hear Jesus speak peace to us and where Jesus gives us His body and blood to eat and drink. If you want God's peace in your life you will want to be in church with the rest of the believers to hear that Word of Peace and receive the Sacrament of Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Here in church is where God promises to give you His peace. If you don't want peace for your life now or forever, avoid this place like the plague. But if you want peace for your life now and forever with God, why would you stay away?

The Epistle from Romans five explains how God applies His peace to us. Hear again a portion of that Reading. **Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God... For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

The apostle Paul makes it clear that our peace depends entirely on God and is received by faith, understood as trust, in Jesus. We have peace with God because of what Jesus did for us on the cross: die because of our sins, taking the punishment of our sins on Himself to save us from them. We are weak and ungodly so God demonstrated His power to save by making Jesus weak with our sins on the cross.

There is no peace in our lives if there is no lasting hope. Our Christian hope is that God in His love sent His Son to die for us sinners, and Jesus rose from the dead and lives to show us the kind of life He has given us through faith in Him. I was told that Dan was willing to help everyone. He was a good man in that. But that helpfulness did not save him for heaven and eternal life. When we have faith in Jesus, our desire is to help others like Jesus first helped us, but the help we receive is from Jesus' death and resurrection, the only thing that counts towards saving us from sin and death.

Finally, the Old Testament Reading from Isaiah 26 reminds us that God's peace is lasting. Isaiah begins by addressing God about the one who has faith and trust. **"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You."** Then he encourages all of us to keep this faith. **"Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock"** (26:3-4).

God saved Dan so he could be at peace with Him through faith in Jesus. Amen.