

## JESUS DIED AND ROSE FOR HIS SHEEP

Jo 10:11-18, 27-30; Ro 5:6-11; Keith Gieseke Funeral; Nov. 12, 2019

When a Christian dies by his own hand, we have a lot of questions. We can know the circumstances around Keith's death, but we can't know for sure what was going through his mind when he took his life. Something we better understand these days is that depressed people who take their own lives don't want to die, but the emotional pain that they are experiencing at the time becomes too much for them to bear. They think their only relief will come through death. It's not true that death is the only way out, because there is help for those who are suffering and feeling this way. Depression is treatable; death is not the answer or treatment for depression.

Suicide causes fear among those who survive. The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment says we should not murder others or ourselves. Killing ourselves is a sin. If we die while in the act of sinning, we don't have time to repent of our sins. Would Keith go to hell if he died before being able to repent? That's a fearful thought.

A death like this brings feelings of guilt to those who are left behind. Do you feel like you failed? Do you feel guilty because you could have said or done more to help Keith? There is a lot of room for guilt now among the living. There's plenty of guilt to go around.

And there is often anger. Are you angry with Keith for doing this to himself, and to you? Some people will commit suicide because they think that whatever pain or suffering they have caused others will end because they die. But it does not make pain go away; it only causes more of it. Or they feel so ashamed of themselves and their weaknesses and they can't bear to face it. And if you feel like you laid that burden on Keith, your burden of guilt and shame must be crushing you. Are you angry with him for doing this to you?

Mixed up with the questions, fears, guilt, anger, and shame is the sorrow of losing a son, a brother, a husband, a friend. What can I say today to answer your questions, assuage your fears, forgive your guilt, take away your shame, and comfort you in your sorrows? In a time like this, I can only look to the cross of Jesus, and so should you.

The only answer to our questions, fears, guilt, anger, shame, and sorrow is found in Jesus Christ who laid down His life for His sheep on the cross and took up His life again, rising from the dead. If we are going to have any comfort today and in the future we need to remember that Keith was one of Jesus' sheep for whom Jesus died on the cross to forgive his sins, even the sin of suicide, and rose from the dead to bring Keith out of death to life again.

If we are going to have any hope at all we need to remember that Jesus made Keith one of His own sheep. Jesus knows him, and Keith knew Jesus in faith. He recognized and listened to the voice of his Good Shepherd in life, and followed Him. If we are Jesus' sheep, we must follow Him from death to life.

In Holy Baptism, Keith died to sin with Jesus and rose in faith to live as a Christian. In Baptism he was buried with Jesus into death, in order that just as Christ rose from the dead, he could rise to new life.

There was a lot of good in Keith, good that he showed in hard work, kindness toward family and friends throughout his life. But if we think that we can balance that good with the bad he did, as if the good he did in life outweighs what he did in taking his life, we would be wrong. Our works can only condemn us; only God's grace in Jesus Christ saves us.

Our Epistle for today from Romans five makes this very point. **For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.**

Jesus Christ died for Keith the sinner. Christ died for the ungodly man. Christ died for Keith when he was weak. And there is hope for him and us in that because the blood of Jesus justified him and us before God and saved us from God's wrath that we deserve.

In his life, Martin Luther was asked questions about Christians who commit suicide. His answers did not downplay the seriousness of the sin, but rather focused on the evil behind it. “It is very certain that, as to all persons who have hanged themselves, or killed themselves in any other way, it was the devil who has put the cord round their necks.” (Luther, Martin, Table Talk entries DLXXXIX, DCCXXXVIII, in *The Table Talk or Familiar Discourse of Martin Luther*, tr. William Hazlitt, London: David Bogue, 1848, pp. 254, alt.)

In another place Luther noted: “I don’t share the opinion that suicides are certainly to be damned. My reason is that they do not wish to kill themselves but are overcome by the power of the devil. They are like a man who is murdered in the woods by a robber.” (*AE*, vol. 54, pg 29, #222, April 7, 1532)

We can connect this to what Jesus said about Himself as the Good Shepherd. He is not like a hired hand, who ran when the wolf comes to steal life. The hired hand **sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.** [Jesus says:] **I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep... My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.**” Jesus came to be Keith’s Shepherd.

For all the questions you have today, that is my only answer. For all your fears, I have the Word of the One who says, **“Do not be afraid; I am with you.”** For all your guilt, you have Jesus, who took all the guilt of your sin and suffered it on the cross in your place. For your anger, God directed all His anger and wrath against His Son on the cross in your place. Jesus despised the shame of the cross and is not ashamed to call you children of God. To comfort you in your sorrows, Jesus has carried all your sorrows to His grave and rose from the dead to give you hope. The words of the psalmist become ours: **“Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me, [O LORD]! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in You”** (25:20). Amen.