

THE LORD WILL RAISE DOUG ON THE LAST DAY
John 6:37-40; Douglas Johnson Funeral; December 2, 2017

Today is the last day of the Church Year; this evening the season of Advent begins. Our focus is on the Last Day when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. Jesus warns us that no one knows the day or the hour of the end. When Doug died last Sunday, no one knew that was his last day and hour on this earth. It came as a surprise to everyone, I'm sure.

Doug and Deb moved out to Washington to be closer to family, especially their grandsons. Doug knew what it was like to be a Navy family since he was a veteran; you serve where they send you. If the Navy was going to move their grandchildren all over the place, at least grandma and grandpa could follow them where they went. Lately Benjamin and Thomas could come over to their house in the morning and Benjamin would ask where grandpa was. He would be waiting in bed for him to come snuggle. That was the plan. God had another plan.

When a death comes suddenly or unexpectedly, people will often say, "It was God's will." While there is truth in that statement there isn't a whole lot of comfort. "It's God's will." Did God want Doug to die so early in his life leaving a grieving widow, children, and young grandchildren who will grow up without a grandpa? Certainly, God allowed this to happen, and He could have done something to prevent it and chose not to. But let's be clear: Death is a thief and an enemy. Death steals life and loved ones from us. Death is an enemy that is too strong for us to defeat. Yet, God did not create us for death but for life. It is God's will that we live, not die. It is God's will that death be defeated so death cannot steal us from Him.

In our Gospel Reading from John six Jesus explains God's will and His plan for carrying out His will. **"I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."**

God's will for us is clear: **that [Jesus] should lose nothing of all that [His Father] has given [Him]**. When Doug was baptized in this church less than two years after it was dedicated, God put His name on him, claiming him as His own child. Doug was marked with the cross on his forehead and heart to make him as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. Jesus paid for Doug by His holy, precious blood and His suffering and death on the cross. And Jesus rose from the dead to declare Doug justified before God. God's Word is clear. God's will for Doug and for us is that we not be lost to God, that not even our enemy, that thief death, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What God wills, what God wants, goes according to His plan. Jesus came down from heaven and became man to carry out God's will to save dying sinners. Even as we remember today that Doug was a loving husband, father, and grandfather with plans to be an important part of the lives of his grandchildren, like he had been in the lives of his girls while they were growing up, we are still here today for his funeral. It is a reminder to us that all the good that God gives for us to do in this life won't keep us alive and save us from death. Without God doing His will for us and carrying out His plan of salvation in Jesus we would have no hope in the face of death.

When death comes to destroy our lives only the hope we have in Jesus Christ can sustain us. I was reminded of this when talking with Deb as we were making funeral arrangements. As she has been dealing with the chaos and stress of Doug's death, she has been finding hope and comfort in God's Word. The first two Readings we heard earlier from the Book of Psalms contained verses that Deb has been holding onto these last several days.

Psalm 95 reminds us that the **Lord is our Rock and Salvation**. When our lives are turned upside down, we can rely on the solid foundation of Jesus, who saves us. And in the sadness of this day, Deb wanted us to be able to celebrate the life God gave Doug. Psalm 118:14 helps us to focus on the life we have in Jesus, the hope – and even joy – it gives us today: **The LORD is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation.**

When Jesus says that it is the will and plan of His Father that not one His own is lost, even though we cannot see it today in the face of death, we will see it on the Last Day when He raises all the dead. As Jesus says: **For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.** What Jesus means by “look on and believe in Him” is a reference back to John chapter three where He says that He will be **lifted up** on the cross for all to see Him, that **whoever believes in Him may have eternal life** (3:14-15). In his life, Doug “looked on” Jesus as the One who died and rose for him. He believed and trusted in the promise that Jesus would raise him from the dead in his body on the Last Day.

Now I have to admit that I learned something about Doug the last couple of days that I didn’t know before. He had a prosthetic/fake eye that would pop out at various times, which he would then stick back in – to the fascination and possibly horror of those who saw it happen. He lost his eye from an injury he sustained while serving in the Navy. He couldn’t see anything out of that eye.

This reminds me of something that Job confessed about the resurrection on the Last Day. **Yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I will see for myself, and my eyes (plural) shall behold, and not another** (19:26b-27a). For most of his life Doug saw with one eye. But on the day Jesus raises him in his glorified body, he will see Him perfectly with both eyes.

A Christian funeral is about the hope we have because Jesus died and rose for us and will raise us up on the last day. It is also about dealing with the change in living experience when they have lost a loved one to death. The loss won’t be forever because of Jesus, but you have to adjust to life without Doug.

Helping veterans adjust from being deployed to being back home through Beyond the Yellow Ribbon was something Doug cared deeply about. Maybe it is because he and other Vietnam veterans, who had served their country honorably, were not received and welcomed back home the way they should have been. Doug wanted to make sure that current veterans would receive the help and support they needed to be reintegrated back home.

When a loved one dies, we need others around us to support us. Thank you to all of you who have done that for this family and will continue to do that in the coming days. We also need the support of God, especially through His holy Word and Sacrament, which is something we have through our life in the congregations of God's Church. We will pray in just a moment from now: "Give courage and faith to the bereaved, that within the communion of Your Church they may have strength to meet the days ahead in the assurance of a holy and certain hope and in the joyful expectation of eternal life with those they love who have departed in the faith" (*LSB Agenda*, Page 121).

What is God's will and plan now that Doug has died? Jesus promises: **For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.** Amen.