

## HAROLD WENT HOME

Mark 2:1-12; Harold Vandermoon Funeral; January 26, 2019

After Harold got home from the Hospital last Saturday, I was able to visit him and talk to him. Not everyone who is as sick as he was at the time is as alert and clear-minded as he was. Certainly, he was tired and worn down, but he knew what was going on. The doctors had explained to him his options, all of them ending with his death. Harold had some choices he could make, none of them any good. What he wanted was to come home to die. He got his wish. Harold went home. Surrounded by family, receiving the comfort care he needed from hospice, his suffering was mercifully short, and then he died at home Tuesday evening.

I think it was appropriate that Harold was able to go home since it was once his job or his volunteer job later in his life to make sure people got home. As a bus driver he picked up children in the morning, took them to school, and made sure they got safely home in the afternoon. As a driver, he would pick up his fellow veterans in this area and take them to the VA hospital for care, and then bring them safely home.

In the Gospel read a little while ago, we heard about some men who brought a paralyzed man to Jesus to be healed. They brought him from his home to the home where Jesus was staying, but they couldn't get close because of the crowd around Jesus. So they carried the paralyzed man to the roof, opened up a hole in it, and lowered the man into the midst of the crowd to where Jesus was to be healed. Why did they go to such extremes to get that man to Jesus? St. Mark tells us.

**And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."**

Now, that doesn't seem to follow. The man was there to be healed of his paralysis, but Jesus forgave his sins. It was almost as if Jesus was saying, "This man is paralyzed because he is a sinner. I'll forgive his sins, but he's still paralyzed." The friends of the man believed in Jesus; it says that **Jesus saw their faith**. Certainly, their faith was that Jesus could heal the man; they were there for healing, not the forgiveness of sins. What good is faith in Jesus to heal you if all He does is forgive your sins and leave you paralyzed?

There is something we need to acknowledge about the relationship between sin and sickness. People get sick and ultimately die because they are sinners. **The wages of sin is death**, St. Paul reminds us in Romans six (6:23). In other words, Harold got sick and died because he was a sinner. And the same thing will happen to all of us because we are just as much sinners as he was.

At the same time, we must be very careful not to play God when we and others get sick and die. We are not in the position of saying that this sickness is God's punishment for that sin. It is fruitless to ask the question, "What exactly did I do to deserve this from God?" It is enough to do as Harold did: confess to his sins to God before receiving the Lord's Supper of Jesus' body and blood. "I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended Thee and justly deserved Thy temporal and eternal punishment." Harold confessed his sin because he had faith in Jesus as the One who would say to him, like Jesus said the paralytic lowered through the roof, **"Son, your sins are forgiven."**

Harold believed that "for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter suffers and death of [God's] Son, Jesus Christ," all his sins were forgiven. This is why he requested the chaplain in Rochester to bring to him the Lord's Supper. The reason he could face his coming death with such courage – for certainly he showed courage and confidence in the face of his impending death – was that this sinner believed in Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins. His Lord and Savior took his sins to the cross, gave His body and shed His blood for him, and rose from the dead to give His living body and blood to give Harold the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. When Jesus says to the one who has faith in Him, **"Son, your sins are forgiven,"** it is forgiveness based on and paid for in full by Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection.

Some of those who heard Jesus forgive the paralytic his sins doubted that He had the authority to do so and considered it blasphemy against God to claim such authority. Jesus' response to them made clear His authority. He **said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic—"I**

**say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”**

If Jesus’ could heal that man then and send him home healthy and alive, why couldn’t He do that for Harold? That’s a good question. The answer is, Yes, Jesus could have done that, but He didn’t, at least, not yet. What we know is that, even though Harold died from sickness and disease caused by sin in him, God took him home to be with Him in heaven forever. Harold’s body is dead, but his soul lives with God forever in heaven, waiting for the day that his physical body will be raised from the dead glorious like the body of Jesus, to live forever. Like Jesus, Harold will pass through the valley of the shadow of death to life forever.

One of the things that Harold was known for in this life was his love for family, his wife, Leone, his children and grandchildren. He enjoyed fun times being with his family and friends, and he will be sorely missed by them. His playful sense of humor will be missed. The sad fact is that when you go home today after the Service, he won’t be there; you won’t get to see him. I’m sure that you want to see him again, not as you last saw him, dying and dead in his bed, but full of life. I’m sure that is his wish as well.

If death is not going to separate you forever from Harold, then you will need to have the same faith in the same Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, that he has. Jesus will raise all the dead on the Last Day, but only those who died with faith in Jesus will be raised to eternal life with Him. If you think you miss Harold now, imagine what it will be like if you don’t join him in heaven because you have given up that faith into which you were baptized and confirmed.

The Holy Spirit kept true faith in Harold by him hearing the Gospel Word of Jesus and receiving His body and blood. For many years he and Leone went to church to do that. Harold cared so much about that happening for him and his family that he even served as the congregational Chairman in Chatfield. For the last number of years that happened in his home, but it continued right up until his death.

I'll say this bluntly: If you, his family and friends, want to see Harold again and be with him forever, then you need to be Christians active in a faithful, Christian congregation where you will hear and receive God's forgiveness of your sins and the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The good and gracious will of God is that He "strengthen and keep you firm in His Word and faith until you die" through the gifts He gives in His Church.

On the Last Day, the words that Jesus spoke to the paralyzed man will have added significance. **"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home."** Harold went home in his soul to be with Jesus when he died. On the Last Day, his physical body will hear Jesus say, **"Rise,"** and Harold will go in his body to his home in heaven to live forever. May we keep the faith and join Harold with Jesus forever in our heavenly home! Amen.