

FUNERAL FOR PATIENCE FISHER

July 10, 2009, 10:00am

INVOCATION:

Eternal God, our heavenly Father, who loves all who are in Christ with an everlasting love and who can turn the shadow of death into the morning: help us now wait upon you with reverent and believing hearts. In this hour speak to us of eternal things, so that through the endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope and be lifted above our darkness and distress into the light and peace of your presence through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WELCOME

My name is John Swanson and I am the senior pastor here at River Hills Community Church. God, in his mercy has permitted me to count Fred and Charity Fisher and their children my friends and called me to be their pastor for the past 11 years. I count it high honor to welcome you on their behalf to this service for mourning the loss of Patience and for rejoicing in their great Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is their desire and, I can assure you, the desire of Patience right now, that we not simply remember our dear little girl but that we find comfort in the only place that comfort can be found: the good news of God concerning the person and work of Jesus. It is our prayer and the prayer of Patience this morning that he alone be the focus of our attention because it is only through him that any hope can be found as we are confronted with the death of our dear little Patience. Please join me in asking God to comfort every believing Christian with the promises of the gospel and to awaken every unbeliever present to the glory of Jesus as the only Savior from sin.

Our great and merciful Father we join our voices to those of the forgiven and redeemed sinners whose spirits are now in your presence asking you to make the glory and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ known upon this earth. We ask you to send forth your mighty Holy Spirit upon this place and upon these people that the beauty of Jesus might be seen and felt so that your people are comforted and so that those who do not see may see. We thank you that Jesus is a mighty and secure fortress for everyone who comes to him and depends upon him. We thank you that the promise of eternal life is a sure and certain promise because of his life and death and resurrection. Give ear to our words, O Lord. Listen to our cry for help our King and our God for to you we pray. Amen.

Let me read for you the obituary for Patience:

“Patience Charity Fisher, age 3, of Janesville, died on Monday, July 6, 2009, at University Hospital, Madison following a swimming pool accident. She was born in Beloit on Nov. 19, 2005, the daughter of Fred and Charity (Juhl) Fisher, II. Patience attended River Hills Community Church. She learned of Jesus' love and sacrifice on the cross. She enjoyed reciting her books of the Bible. Her favorite Bible verses were John 3:16 and I John 1:9. Patience loved to sing, dance, read books, ride her bike and take walks. She loved baking with mommy, and being pushed on the swing by daddy. She also loved playing house and dress up with her sisters and getting piggy back rides from her brothers.

She is survived by her parents, Fred II and Charity Fisher of Janesville; 4 siblings: Fred III, Larry, Love and Trinity Fisher; maternal grandparents, Larry and Dawn Juhl of Janesville; paternal grandparents, Fred (Raven) Fisher of Brodhead and Shirley Fisher of Beloit; maternal great grandparents, Eleanor Juhl of Janesville and Wayne and Helen Campbell of Beloit; paternal great grandmother, Ellen Fisher of Beloit; 3 aunts: Laurie McAtee of Beloit, Amanda Juhl of Janesville, and Caroline (Jim) Schraufnagel of Endeavor; 2 uncles: Paul (Jen) Juhl of Orfordville and William Juhl of Janesville; 16 cousins, and other family and friends. She was

preceded in death by her maternal great grandfather, Paul Juhl, and paternal great grandparents, Jesse T. Fisher and Emil and Sylvia Grossen.”

In the face of our great loss we are yet going to sing this morning in joyful praise of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. It may seem strange to some of you that we would sing because only happy people sing and we are not happy people here this morning. However, it is right to sing our joy in Christ while we grieve the loss of Patience. The apostle Peter, when writing to Christians who were undergoing a wide range of suffering, including the death of loved ones, said this, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you who are being shielded by God’s power through faith until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time. In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes, though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Therefore, grieving Christians can and do rejoice. The joy of Fred and Charity and all who trust in Christ is in this great salvation that has been won for us, for Patience, by the life and death of Jesus and made real for us by the mighty work of the Holy Spirit. It is right that as we mourn we also rejoice in Christ. So please join us in singing our praise and listening to the words of promise that will be read for us.

Congregational singing (words on screen, please stand):

Lord, I Lift Your Name on High (please be seated after)

Scripture recitation: Love Fisher

Psalm 23

Congregational singing:

Jesus Loves Me (3 verses)

Scripture Reading: Dave Joos

Romans 8:15-18 & 28-39

Congregational singing:

Knowing You

Scripture Reading: Dave Joos (Please stand)

John 6:35-40 & 14:1-6

Congregational singing:

Jesus, Thank You (please be seated after singing)

Sermon: “Enduring Truth”

Over the past two weeks as I have spent time with Fred and Charity up at the hospital a verse of Scripture has proven helpful in guiding our discussions as we waited to see what God would do in regard to Patience. God says through his prophet Moses as recorded in the OT book of Deuteronomy, in the 29th verse of the 29th chapter: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.”

God tells us that there are many things that only he knows and that we do not and cannot know. He alone is God and we are not. Thus, there are many questions to which God has an answer but to which we do not have an answer because he has not given the answers to us. This restrains our arrogance and informs us that this is

not our world but God's world. He has a right, as the Creator and Sustainer of all things to reveal what he wants to reveal and to keep hidden or secret what he wants to keep secret.

However, the second half of that verse is full of hope because God has not left us in the dark, groping for purpose and meaning and direction in the midst of the inscrutable things that happen to us. When confronted with such horrors as Fred and Charity and their family have endured these last two weeks and will continue to endure God has not left us without help. He has told us many things about the meaning of his universe and how to know him and how to live in his world. He has explained the meaning of suffering and death and how he has made a provision for us in the sending of his son, Jesus Christ.

The fact that God has spoken and revealed much about himself and the world he has made means that the only way any human being can know what is going on is if he or she pays attention to what God has said. This means that none of us can trust our own judgments or thinking but must submit ourselves to what God has said. Just because you think something is true doesn't mean it is true. God alone knows what is true and he has revealed true things about his world and so he does not think that whatever you happen to think about him and about yourself and about his world is OK. There is truth and there is error. My grandfather, who died in 1979, believed to the day of his death that the earth was flat, in spite of the numerous pieces of evidence with which we his grandchildren regularly confronted him. My grandfather's belief in the flatness of the earth was wrong. He was sincere in his belief but he was wrong. In the same way just because you sincerely believe something does not make it true or right. My prayer and the prayer of Fred and Charity and of Patience this morning is that God might use his powerful word to help each person here to abandon all the man-made myths and fables and falsehoods that infect our hearts and to find the enduring truth that God has made known to us in his word.

Fred and Charity know that the only way to find hope in the face of this great tragedy is to pay attention to and believe what God himself has said to us. They know that the only way that they and their children will be able to live through this great loss is to hold fast to what God has said to them in his written word, concerning his glorious Son, Jesus Christ. I am going to briefly recount both for the comfort of the Fisher family and for the help of every person here a few of those things that God has revealed to us so that we can live with hope in this very broken world.

The first thing I want to mention that God has revealed to us is that life and all the pleasures of life are a gift from God. The apostle Paul when speaking to the idol worshipping pagan citizens of Athens, Greece said this: "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and he does not live in temples built by hands and he is not served by human hands as though he needed anything; for he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." What Fred and Charity know and every person in here needs to know as well is this: God doesn't need you or me but we need him. He alone is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. He is the one who made Fred and Charity and he is the one who made each of their children. He gave each of their children life and he has given each one every breath he or she has taken. He is the one who gave them Patience. He is the one who gave them the many happy days they had with her. It was he who gave to her the joy of playing dress-up with her big sister, Love. It was God who gave to her the pleasure of two big brothers to give her piggy-back rides. It was God himself that provided her with the enjoyment of reading books with mom and of laying down with dad to take a nap. All these delights came from God as a gift. Patience did not deserve to live. She did not decide to breathe. Fred and Charity did nothing to earn life and all the joys they have experienced in life. The great and gracious God of all the earth showered all these kindnesses, these pleasures upon Patience and her family as gifts.

The second thing I want to mention that God has revealed to us is this: He has given us all of these gifts so that we will recognize him as the greatest and best of all beings. He has given us these gifts so that our hearts will be full of joy and amazement and love for him. He has given us these gifts so that we will be full of gratitude and contentment in him and his abundant provision and love. The Bible resounds with this declaration. Consider this one example, Psalm 148:

“Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. ² Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. ³ Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. ⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. ⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. ⁶ He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. ⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, ⁸ lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, ⁹ you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, ¹⁰ wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, ¹¹ kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, ¹² young men and maidens, old men and children. ¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.”

God made this world and put us in it and gives us all these joys and pleasures so that he, not any part of his creation, including children, will be the center of our attention and our affection.

The third thing God has revealed to us and that Fred and Charity and Patience know is this: Every human being, by nature, prefers creation to the Creator. There isn't a person sitting in this room who naturally believes that to know God and be loved by God is a superior pleasure to careers and family and vacations and good jobs and secure retirements and good health and successful children and a long life. God, through the chief spokesperson for Christ, the apostle Paul says this: “For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served created things, rather than the creator who is forever praised.” Every human being comes forth from his or her mother’s womb hard wired to love the pleasures of creation more than the Creator. God is not glorious to us; rather the gifts that he has given are what fill us with joy. It is out of this inherent disregard for the greatness and the glory of the Creator that all of the evil that we do as humans comes.

Jesus confirms this when he was asked, “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment?” He answered, “The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment and a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Upon these two depend the whole law and the prophets.” Jesus says that the purpose of life, the reason that you and I exist is so that we will love God supremely and then love other people as we naturally love ourselves. You and I were not made for the purpose of having jobs or children or so we could play games or invent cool things or build cars or care for our lawns or have sex or get drunk or get rich. We were made to love God and others.

What I know about myself is this: I have never loved God as I ought. I lived the first 22 years of my life hardly ever thinking about God, let alone loving him. Now, though I want to love God, I don't. I ignore him and I do things he doesn't want me to do and I don't do the things he wants me to do. When it comes to loving my neighbors, I think that is a really good idea. I wish you guys loved others better. As for me, I ignore people I could help. I get mad at my family, the people I say I love the most. I don't love my neighbor as myself. Listen to me, if you don't know this about yourself and about your children you are living in a dream world. You are out of touch with reality. You have embraced myths and fables and falsehoods. God has told us that we are rebels and sinners. Fred, Charity and Patience know this about themselves and it is one of the things that give them hope.

How can knowing that you are a sinner be a hope producing fact? That is because of the fourth thing I want to tell you that God has said in his word: God saves sinners. Here is the best and most certain thing that God has said that fills Fred and Charity with joy and, I can assure you, is the source of all of Patience's joy and happiness at this moment. The eternal son of God, took on human flesh when he was born, in fulfillment of all of God's promises in the OT, of the virgin Mary. Jesus lived a perfect life, always loving God, never preferring creation to the Creator. Jesus always loved others as he loved himself. He never disobeyed his parents. He never lied. He was never inappropriately angry. He fulfilled the purpose for which we were made; to love God and people made in the image of God. Then Jesus willingly went to the cross on behalf of everyone who trusts

in him. He willingly took upon himself the full measure of God's just anger against our sins. Because God is good he must punish sin. God does not lie. He told Adam that if he disobeyed by eating the fruit he would die. So, death and hell are God's just and fair punishment for our sin. Therefore, in order for God to justly love and forgive sinners he killed his perfect son upon that cross. He offered up his son, who is the only human who deserved to live forever, to pay the penalty for the sins of all who believe.

Right now Fred and Charity, while filled with grief in the loss of their little girl are also filled with joy in the knowledge that she is safe and happy in the presence of Jesus. They do not have this joy because they believe Patience deserved to go to heaven. They do not have this joy because they believe the myth that most Americans believe that she was innocent of wrong and worthy of being loved by God. They know their little girl was a sinner from the moment of conception and that she gave much evidence of her sinfulness in her short life. They are full of joy because they know that Jesus didn't sin and Jesus suffered hell for Patience. He took upon himself God's just wrath against their daughter. They have confidence Jesus did this for her because she trusted in Jesus. She delighted to sing of his love and to talk about his word. She didn't do anything or decide anything that gained her life with God forever. Rather, she depended upon Jesus to do for her what she could not do for herself. Thus right now, Patience is rejoicing in the presence and the person of Jesus. She is happier than she has ever been in her life. She is more at home now than she ever was in Fred and Charity's home. She now knows how foolish and wicked it is to prefer anyone or anything to Jesus. She is right now astonished that a sinner like her is so loved by this great and good God. She is now longing for the day when her great Savior and Lord will return to this earth and visibly manifest his glory and resurrect her body so that she and the countless thousands of people who have died in Christ and who will be living in Christ at that moment will live with him clothed in immortal bodies in the new heavens and the new earth forever. It is this knowledge that God has given through his word that is the source of Fred and Charity's joy in the midst of their grief.

There are so many other things that God has revealed to us in his word that give hope to all who believe but I will end by telling you this one more: As some of you know my oldest son was severely injured in a skiing accident seven years ago. He survived but suffered a traumatic brain injury which has disabled him so that he now lives with us and is cared for by us. Over the years many well meaning people have said to me, as they will say to Fred and Charity, "we do not know why God permits these kinds of things to happen." I have said to each person who has said that to me, that is not true. God has told us many of the reasons that he sends all the suffering and misery that happens to us. I will end by telling you two of the reasons that God has revealed for why he sends suffering upon human beings, including his own children. First, as the late C.S. Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." C.S. Lewis is merely expressing what God has revealed to us in his word. One time, when there was a crowd of people around Jesus they were abuzz with the latest news from Jerusalem. The Roman governor, Pilate, found out that a group of Jewish rebels had come to the temple to worship. He sent his soldiers into the temple and butchered them and threw their dead bodies on the altar. So the crowd asked Jesus what he thought about this horrible and violent act. This is what Jesus said to the crowd: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them-- do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." There is one thing that every man, woman and child sitting in this room should realize as you are confronted with Patience's death and the grief of the Fisher family. If you do not repent of your sins and trust in Christ alone to save you, you will perish. The violence and suffering and misery that is in this world is a warning from God for each one of us: there is worse trouble coming and if you do not repent and trust Christ you will be overwhelmed by it. I can assure you that if Patience could speak to us now she would tell us this one thing: forsake your sins and flee to Christ to save you from your sins. He is better than whatever pleasure has enslaved you. He is better than life itself. To have Christ and to lose everything is to lose nothing for he is life. So I urge you to abandon all the myths and falsehoods and pipe dreams that you are holding onto and believe what God has said about you and about his Son. Join that great company of men and woman who have fled from their sins and found refuge in Christ alone so that one day you can join them around the throne of this great and merciful God worshipping him for his amazing grace.

A second thing God has told us about the suffering he sends is this: He sends suffering upon Christians so that we will discover that to be loved by God through Christ, to have sins forgiven and to be guaranteed heaven through the work of Jesus is the best thing that can ever happen to a human being. That is what Peter meant in that passage I quoted earlier, “These (trials) have come so that your faith... may be proved genuine and may result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” One of the reasons God has taken Patience from us is so that Fred and Charity and their children and every one who knows and loves them will discover that having Jesus is better than having Patience. Without suffering like this you cannot really know if your faith is in Jesus or in your bank account or your job or your health or your happy children. No one can know why God sends one sort of suffering to one person and another form to someone else. What we can know is that his aim in the suffering he sends to his children is so that we will find greater joy in Christ and his saving work. He aims for us to be truly amazed at his love and grace given to us in Jesus.

O Lord, we wait for you. We do know because of what you have done in Jesus and told us in your word that your love for all who wait for you is an eternal love. We do praise and glorify you our Lord Jesus for securing all of God’s promises for us by your death. We do praise you great Holy Spirit for assuring us of the Father’s love and for giving us the gift of repentance and faith in Jesus. Be near us now, as you have promised us, for the glory of your name. Amen.

Congregational singing (Please stand):

Amazing Grace

Prayers (Please be seated)

Almighty God, you have knit your chosen people together in one communion; in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Give to your whole church in heaven and on earth your light and your peace.

Grant that all who have trusted in Christ’s death and resurrection may die to sin and rise to newness of life and that through the grave and gate of death, we may pass with Him to our joyful resurrection.

Grant to us who are still in our pilgrimage and who walk as yet by faith that your Holy Spirit may lead us in holiness and righteousness all our days.

Grant to your faithful people pardon and peace, that we may be cleansed from all our sins and serve you with a quiet mind. Give to all who mourn a sure confidence in your loving care, that casting all their sorrow on you, they may know the consolation of your love.

Give courage and faith to those who are bereaved that they may have strength to meet the days ahead in the comfort of a holy and certain hope. Help us in the midst of things we cannot understand, to believe and trust in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection to life eternal.

God of all grace, you sent your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, to bring life and immortality to light through the gospel. We give you thanks, because by his death, Jesus destroyed the one who holds the power of death and by his resurrection has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Make us certain that because He lives, we shall live also, and that neither death nor life nor things present nor things to come shall be able to separate us from your love, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Commendation

Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend the child of your grace, Patience Charity Fisher. Acknowledge, we humbly ask you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock and a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive her into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace and into the glorious company of the saints in light. Amen.

Benediction

May the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power forever. Amen.

Let us go forth in the name of Christ.