

August 19, 2012

Jacob
No More
Genesis 35:16-19

Opening Words: Around 125 A.D., a Greek by the name of Aristeides wrote to one of his friends, trying to explain the extraordinary success of the new religion, Christianity. In his letter he said, *"If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they accompany his body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby."* We understand that nearby place to be heaven. It has been true of the faith from the very beginning. We have hope even in the face of death.

This is my tenth message in my summer sermon series on Jacob. The end of the story is quickly approaching. According to the scripture lesson for today, Rachel, the love of Jacob's life, dies in child birth. Those are shocking words. They pack a sting generations later. In my opinion, there is nothing sadder than a woman losing her life to create another. The connection between our generation and Jacob's generation is obvious. With all of our advanced science, there comes a time when each one of us will die. Each one of us is terminal from birth. Are you ready to die? May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture lesson, Genesis 35:16-19. Let me call this message *No More*.

Genesis 35:16-19 16 Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. 17 And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't despair, for you have another son." 18 As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. 19 So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20 Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb.

In 1888 Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, awoke to read his own obituary. The obituary was printed as a result of a simple journalistic error. You see, it was Alfred's brother that had died and the reporter carelessly reported the wrong death. Any man would be disturbed under the circumstances, but to Alfred the shock was overwhelming. In his own obituary, he saw himself as the world saw him. The "Dynamite King," the great industrialist who had made an immense fortune from explosives. This, as far as the general public was concerned, was the entire purpose of Alfred's life. His core values remained hidden from the public. In his heart, he longed for peace but the world only saw him as a merchant of violence and death. On that day he vowed to change his public

image. He decided to use his fortune to fund five annual prizes. They would go to the individuals who made the greatest contributions in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, and peace. A sixth category, economics, was added later. The most valuable of the prizes went to peace. Has anyone here not heard of the Nobel Peace Prize? That story leads to an interesting question. How do you want to be remembered?

There is no easy way to say it. Rachel, the love of Jacob's life, died. According to the story she died in child birth. The only positive in this story is the birth of Jacob's twelfth and last son, Benjamin. Jacob must have been filled with mixed emotions. Time must have stood still as he stood next to Rachel's grave holding his infant son. Just think about it for a moment. On the very day he held his son for the very first time, he kissed the love of his life for the last time. We always remember Bethlehem as the place where Jesus was born. We should also remember Bethlehem as the place where Rachel was buried. He must have thought, "This couldn't be happening. Where had all the years gone? How would he live without her?" What would he tell Benjamin about his mother? How would Benjamin live knowing he was the cause of his own mother's death? There is nothing easy about life. There is nothing easy about death. Have you ever had to bury someone you couldn't live without? If this story hits too close to home say, **"Amen!"**

When I got out of seminary, I served a three point United Methodist Charge near St. Clairsville, Ohio. I served the United Methodist congregations in Morristown, Lloydsville and Bannock. I am unable to say anything negative about those churches. They helped me in a time of loss. Within the Lloydsville congregation, there was a retired pastor and his wife, Carl and Iona Finch. Years earlier, they had served those congregations. He helped me during those early days and made my transition to this denomination easier. I thought about Carl as I wrote this week's message. For you see Carl was not a healthy man. Years earlier he had suffered a stroke and never completely recovered. He was old beyond his years and it was clear the end was in sight. He knew it and said to me one day words I have never forgotten. He said, "Russ, I am not afraid of being dead. It is this dying thing that bothers me." I have always thought there was wisdom in those honest words. We know heaven is going to be perfect but is anyone here in a hurry to go? Is anyone here bothered by the dying process? Would anyone here like to get out of this world with a little dignity?

Today, I don't want to talk about dying. I want to talk about being dead. I want to talk about being in heaven with Jesus and all our loved ones. I want to talk about three things you won't find in heaven. In heaven there is going to be no stress. In heaven there is going to be no suffering. In heaven there is going to be no separation. Revelation 21:4 tells us about heaven. It says, *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there*

be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. "That sounds good to me. So if you are ready to begin say, **"Amen!"**

Stress

First, in heaven there is no stress. What is stress? Webster defines stress as emotional or physical strain caused by anxiety. Stress can cause both raised blood pressure and depression. Years ago, we didn't talk about stress. We talked about life. Let's be honest. Life, itself, is stressful. What causes you the most of stress?

Stress experts say it normally from four areas. They are all connected about some point. These are the four:

1. Finances
2. Work
3. Health
4. Relationships

What keeps you up at night? Where are your worries rooted? Was anyone here up last night worrying about *your finances*? You just don't have enough money to pay all the bills. You don't have enough money to fix your car. You don't have enough money to send your children to college? Your retirement funds are exhausted. Was anyone here up last night worrying about *your job*? They expect you to do more work with less help. You are afraid to take a vacation because you may not have a job when you return. You are afraid your position is going to be eliminated. You are afraid your skill is obsolete. Was anyone here up late last night worrying about *your health*? You don't seem to have enough energy. The freckle on your arm looks funny. The doctor wants to see you right away. Was anyone here up late last night worrying about *your relationships*? Your marriage has grown stale. You don't like your children's friends. You don't like your children's spouse. Your own mother makes you sick. Do I have to go on? Do I really have to go on? Where are your worries rooted? What is causing you the most amount of stress? In heaven there is going to be no stress. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

Suffering

John and Barbara Wise had been married for forty-five years. She was the love of his life. They shared everything. One of the things they shared was their desire not live out their lives bedridden and disabled. That is what everyone desires but John took Barbara's words to heart. According to the Associated Press, Barbara had a stroke and the nightmare became a reality. It didn't take Barbara's life. However, it did take her freedom and integrity. Nearly unresponsive, she was taken to the intensive care unit. It was at that moment John did the most difficult thing. He pulled the trigger and shot his wife in the head. She died a day later. You answer this question. Was it murder? Was it a

mercy killing? If you answered, "Yes!" to the later then you believe death is better than suffering. The great Greek play write Sophocles said, *"Death is not the greatest of evils; it is worse to want to die, and not be able."*

The world is a great place when you are healthy. The world is a great place when everyone you know is healthy. However, the world isn't such a great place when your health erodes away. I have never met a person who dreamed of being crippled and bedfast. I have never met a person who wanted to be fed, washed or turned to avoid bed sores. I have never met a person who wanted to be alone and unwanted. I have never met a person who wanted to be a burden. I can don't condone what John Wise did but I understand what he did. Death is an escape from suffering. In heaven there no suffering. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

Separation

A few days before his death, Dr. F. B. Meyer wrote a very dear friend these words: *"I have just heard, to my great surprise, that I have but a few days to live. It may be that before this reaches you, I shall have entered the palace. Don't trouble to write. We shall meet in the morning."* Third and finally, in heaven there is no separation. We are going to be with Jesus and all your believing loved ones.

On Thursday I had an experience of a lifetime. I was humbled to be invited to fly with the 171 Air Refueling Wing of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard. There were eighteen civilians on the flight who flew on a KC 135. We actually got to witness in the in flight fueling. I want to thank Mark Rauschenberg for this opportunity. He serves in the Air National Guard and submitted my name. We flew for about two hours. We went from Pittsburgh, west to central Illinois, north to Lake Erie and then returned to western Pennsylvania. It was a tremendous experience and there was only one thing I would change. It is just a small thing but it would have made a great deal to me. I wish Mark could have come with me. The seventeen other people were nice but I didn't know them. (I didn't want to know them. They were wearing their Steeler gear.) This tremendous experience would have been even better if Mark had experienced with me. Have you ever experienced something and wished someone was with you? In heaven there is going to be no separation! And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

In 2004, Arnold Palmer, one of the greatest players in the history of golf, played in his last Master's Tournament. It was his fiftieth. It was really quite a moment. He had such an outstanding career. Palmer had 62 tour wins. Including winning the Master's five times, the U.S. Open once and the PGA three times. By 2004, his time in the golf world was running out. He wanted to walk away quietly but his army would not let him. The crowd followed him during that last Master's Tournament and grew with every hole. By the time he got to the eighteen hole

the crowd was over following. When he sank that last putt the crowd roared with approval. For the first time he looked around to see who had gathered. There were many faces he did not know but there were faces he did know. There was his family, his wife, children and grandchildren. There were his friends. There were old competitors, Jack Nicklaus and Gary Player. There were the greatest players of 2004, Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson. There was his entire world. They were all cheering for him and telling him he was special. They congratulated him on living an outstanding life.

I believe heaven is going to be like Arnold Palmer's eighteenth hole at the 2004 Master's Tournament. When we get to heaven we are going to be surrounded by the people of our lives who are going to congratulate us for finishing the course. When I get to heaven my parents, Ron and Ruth Adams, are going to be in the crowd. My paternal grandparents, Roger and Helen Adams, are going to be in my crowd. My maternal grandparents, Walter and Nina Milligan, are going to be in the crowd. My good friend from seminary, David Glenn, who died far too soon, is going to be in my crowd. My Uncle Bob, who died in a plane crash, is going to be there in my crowd. And way back in the crowd I will be able to see a new face, my paternal grandmother, Orbie Adams. He died seven years before I was born. And of course there is going to be the saints from this church, Chic Baber, Alice Russell, Lamont Macaulay and others. They are all going to be there for me! They are all going to be there for me! Each one congratulating me. Each one cheering for me. It is going to be great! In heaven there is no separation. And there is going to be one more in my crowd. I believe he is going to stand near the back, where the humble go. You know his name. His name is Jesus and he is going to mouth those words I long to hear, "Well done! Good and faithful servant!" Who is going to be in your crowd when you get to heaven? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

Carl Finch was right! I am not afraid of being dead. It is this dying thing that bothers me. In heaven there is going to be no stress. In heaven there is going to be no suffering. In heaven there is going to be no separation. Confucius once said, *"Heaven is being one with God."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**