

FROM DEATH UNTO LIFE
June 4, 2017 –John 10: 9-18 –Communion
The Church of the Covenant

We are locked in a life and death struggle and it regards our children. According to Coroner Timothy Warco there were 109 drug overdose deaths in Washington County in 2016 versus 73 in 2015. The first year he served as Coroner in 1992 there were two drug overdose deaths in all of Washington County. When I speak of such matters someone always buttonholes me afterward and says in effect, “Why are you trying to put down our community like this?” No, I was born and raised here and I have chosen to return here and by NOT speaking about something we are giving it permission to continue; we are sticking our head in the sand and are in classic denial. And we don’t really love people if we keep our mouth shut. No, Washington County is ground zero in a drug overdose epidemic and the Church of Jesus Christ has something to say and something to do to make a difference.

I read the obituaries every day. And when you do you see a new phenomenon. It is the increased death of young people in their twenties and thirties and it is noted with phrases like: “They died unexpectedly; they died peacefully in their sleep.” Truth --They died of a drug overdose. In the beginning I was just sad when I would read about their lives truncated and cut short too soon. And then I would get angry – Why isn’t someone doing something? This is totally unacceptable! And now when I read them I just weep. I remember reading one not too long ago of an obviously fine young man, highly educated, a gifted athlete; obviously a great family, handsome and winsome and someone who others were naturally drawn to, who had so much of life ahead of him, who died “peacefully in his sleep”. He had all of life ahead of him and died at the ripe old age of 24. And when I read that obituary I wasn’t angry or sad anymore I just wept and kept saying over and over again, “This is unacceptable; this is just so unacceptable...” He should have been full of life and he was full of death. Unacceptable. I believe Jesus wept in heaven for that young man, too.

Parents, don’t think that education or having your kids involved in frenetic activities like sports or having your kids raised in a nice home somehow inoculates your child from this scourge. Education alone and busy-ness are no cure. It doesn’t work. Don’t wait until it happens to someone in your family or to a friend of your child. Wake up now. Because there is a spiritual dimension to this drug overdose phenomenon and this we entirely overlook. The spiritual cure of an addictive disease is precisely the business of the church; we either are or are not being part of the spiritual solution to addiction.

I illustrate this by unpacking Jesus’ great words in the gospel of John, “I came that they may have life...” (John 10: 10) To put it bluntly, Jesus has come that those young people might have LIFE and not death. Are we, as the church, making certain they have the life of Jesus alive in their heart or not? Jesus begins by noting that he is the “door” “If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.” (John 10: 9) He is no generic “higher power” nor is He one of many doors to life. He is THE door; the one and only door; open this door and you find LIFE; open any other door and it can lead to death. Then He says: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (v. 10) The thief is of course the evil one. The evil spiritual reality at work in the world today. He is a liar and the father of lies and so will induce someone by his lies on paths and through doorways that lead to death, not life. He is like a prowling lion hunting around for someone to devour. In spiritual discernment you always know what spirit is at work in something –does it tear down?, does it malign?, does it harm?, does it disparage?, does it steal someone away from God?, does it kill them? Does it kill their spirit and their soul? Does it create or does it destroy? You know what spirit is at work by whether it “steals, kills and destroys”. The evil one will take your life if you let him. All addictive behavior is about stealing one’s life away, and killing, and destroying everything of

good and value in one's life. Ruining one's reputation, one's job, one's relationships, one's family. That's why we know absolutely and for sure where 109 drug overdose deaths come from. Another name for the evil one is apollyon, the destroyer. By contrast, we know when Jesus shows up. Because Jesus promises: ***I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*** (John 10: 10) "The evil one comes and brings DEATH. Jesus has come to bring LIFE and not just LIFE –but new life, and spiritually reborn life, and abundant life and eternal life.

When someone receives Jesus they invite HIM into their heart and into their life. The Holy Spirit comes and takes up residency in their heart. The Spirit of Jesus pushes everything not of HIM out of someone's heart and life. The Holy Spirit pushes out any spirit other than the Spirit of the One True and Living God. LIFE pushes out death. Someone is moved from death unto life. Jesus pushes out evil. Empty spiritual hearts are subject to addictions. A heart empty of Jesus will be filled with something or someone else. Nature abhors a vacuum. Addictive behaviors come when Jesus is not present. When we invite Jesus in, when we fill our lives with hanging out with other Christians, and doing good deeds, and filling our life and heart with prayer and the reading of scripture and the worship of God, then this pushes everything else out of our life. In a way, we become addicted to HIM and not to the things of this world. We become obsessed with living for HIM and so we turn our back on the things of death. Children and young people whose heart is filled with the love of Jesus will not then try to fill their heart with something that leads to death...

One entity comes to steal, kill and destroy. But Jesus comes that they may have life. Enter through Jesus the door and move FROM DEATH UNTO LIFE...

There is no condemnation in what I have said. People struggling with addictive behaviors do not need condemnation; they already condemn themselves enough; the guilt they already load themselves up with is probably the trigger that causes them to use; they already have a voice in their head from the evil one seeking to move them away from the Lord of life. This is a word of hope from the Lord, not condemnation. This is a door out of addiction and into new life in Christ. This is the voice of Jesus saying: Come unto me, for I will give you life, not death...I end with hope. A group of young people approached me a while back wanting to start an AA meeting here at the church. It really is for young people facing multiple addictions, alcohol and drugs. I am so pleased that our church didn't find 10,000 reasons for them not to be able to come, but opened the door for them. Jesus is always an open door. In the beginning I would show up to make sure the room was set up and the door unlocked. And I was struck by something. These are very nice young people. They are clean cut. Educated. With all of life ahead of them. Articulate. Excellent leaders. In a way they look like they should be going to the Senior Class Prom, not an AA meeting. These are our kids. They are our neighbors. They are our sons and daughters and grandchildren. Sometimes, I am told as many as 70 show up. Praise God.

Our whole community needs to be suffused with the Spirit of the Living God. Our churches need to be on fire for the Lord. We have a solution to the scourge of addiction. We are the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who will come in power and in love to reclaim not only these fine young people but also His church, sleeping, silent and dormant and sadly ineffective to bring the Lord of Life to bear into a season of death for our young people. Jesus says: "The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; but I came that they may have LIFE." Thank you, Lord Jesus- In YOU there is HOPE. Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!