

A READER OF OBITUARIES
Psalm 23: 1-6 January 14, 2018
The Church of the Covenant

So don't you hope someone will say some nice words over you when you're dead and gone? I read a story about Germany as WWII was coming to a close. They had a secret weapon, Die Glocke, that was shaped like a giant bell. It was so powerful they had to keep it contained in a giant cement structure or Die Glocke would fly off on its own. As the Allies were nearing where Die Glocke was stored the Nazis broke open the cement housing and Die Glocke sailed off into the sky. I am told it landed in a farmer's field here in Western PA near Kecksville, 1945. Unfortunately, when it fell to earth it hit a man in the field and killed him. An old farmer was being interviewed for the paper and was asked the man's name. And the old farmer scratched his head and said: "I don't know his name. But his face sure rings a bell!" So as a Reader of Obituaries I wonder what the obituary editor would have written right under the man's name – "Dead Ringer Killed by Giant Handbell"????

I am A READER OF OBITUARIES. I read the paper with care each day, not just to make sure I think it was as Mark Twain said, to make sure my name isn't there. But I read obituaries with great care because sometimes I find listed close family members of our church that then I try to go to the funeral home and visit. So I see the changes in obituaries over the years. Sad things – Whenever a person in their 20's or 30's dies "unexpectedly" it means they probably died of a drug overdose. There is now frequent mention of people's pets. The fact that folks are avid Steeler fans seems to be the main character trait of people waiting to enter the pearly gates. But I have noticed that most people any more do not have any kind of funeral service, whether in a church or the funeral parlor, that anyone might deem "religious". Those that do tend to be in their 80's and 90's. Those younger it tends to say, "There will be a memorial at a later time." But what that means is that there probably won't be any kind of service at all; Old Uncle Joe will sit on the mantle in his urn until some other family member 20 years later tries to figure out what to do with it. I'd guess maybe only one in ten people even have a religious memorial service today. That's sad because it means fewer and fewer people have even the remotest connection to a church, to a church family, to a pastor, and worst of all, they have no relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the One who will grant them eternal life. Who's going to say those kind words over you when you die? I did a "spreading of the ashes" for an "Old Uncle Joe" who liked fishing in the Chesapeake Bay. Nothing wrong with liking to fish; its just not going to grant you eternal life. Anyway, so we're out in a small boat in the Chesapeake and its windy and the waves are rising so Pastor Broberg, who has never spread ashes before, let alone in a rolling small boat in the Chesapeake, decides he is going to fling the ashes way up into the air with great drama as he intones "and the sea shall inherit the dead" and of course what happens is a gust of wind blows Old Uncle Joe right back into the boat. (Cough-cough, hack-hack). "Yes, good old Uncle Joe is indeed with us ALWAYS."

So what's everybody out there thinking? Out in the world beyond the church, what kind of thought process gets you to the end of your life with no church, no pastor, and no relationship with Jesus Christ? No church family to give you comfort and support. No place to have a

bereavement luncheon. Nothing mentionable in your obituary, even remotely, that relates to faith or core values that are eternal or things that have significance beyond your own lifetime. You went to Steelers games, you didn't cheat at cards, you liked to gamble at the Meadows, you didn't kick your dog, you had a family and then one day you died...and honestly there wasn't much more to say about you. What the heck are you thinking? Make a New Year's resolution –JOIN A CHURCH. Now, while you can. Make a New Year's resolution –BEFRIEND A PASTOR. He's the one who's going to say some kind words over you when you're gone. Make a New Year's resolution –BECOME AN ACTIVE EVERY SUNDAY EVERY MONDAY KIND OF AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN; invest your life in those things which are eternal, that have real meaning, not most of the drivel mentioned in most obituaries. And MOST IMPORTANTLY make a New Year's resolution to have a life-giving, eternal life providing, personal and profound relationship with the One who was Himself raised from the dead, the living Lord Jesus Christ. *"I am the resurrection and the life"* says Jesus. If that's not clear from your obituary then your obituary is just so much fluff and empty words. It is a vapor; here and gone today. You are just dust in the wind over the Chesapeake. Don't you want to be more than that?

Now for the 23rd Psalm, often read at a Christian's funeral service. "The Lord is my shepherd." The Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the One whom I follow in my life. As a sheep of HIS pasture I follow HIM every day, because if I don't pretty soon I get off the path and lose my way. I believe when I follow HIM "I will have no want." I believe as I follow Jesus in my personal daily life indeed HE will lead me to green pastures; HE ultimately won't lead me to a bad place; the GOOD Shepherd only leads His sheep to a GOOD place. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, no matter what happens to me in my life, "I will fear no evil." Shepherd, You're here with Your rod and Your staff to defend me and to club the evil wolves of life away from me. I believe as I follow YOU I will have an abundant overflowing life, *"My cup runneth over"*. And Lord, I know, I absolutely know, in that day when I die, because of YOU, and what YOU have done for me at Calvary, and because I have sought to follow YOU and YOU ALONE in my life, Lord I trust You, that *"I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* Just like the way You led me in life, You will lead me safely into the arms of God and into eternity. In life, HE restoreth my soul. When a loved one dies, HE restoreth my soul. When I die, HE restoreth my soul. *He restoreth my soul! (Psalm 23: 3)*

Invite the Good Shepherd to be the LORD of your life today. And today choose to FOLLOW HIM. Don't put it off. Then trust me, you'll never have to worry about what is written about you in your obituary, or what is said about you at your funeral, because your life will speak volumes. (I always say, A Christian's life preaches) My friend, your life will preach eternity with every WORD. That's what I've learned from being A READER OF OBITUARIES. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*