

I. Word of Hope (John 11:25-27)

- A. Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”
- B. This same word of hope is given to you today from the words of Jesus Christ, the Resurrection and the Life.

II. Mr. Frank loved to tell stories

- A. If you knew Mr. Frank for more than about 10 seconds, then you’d better have more than 10 seconds to give him. You knew that he loved to tell stories.
- B. Often his stories had to do with the time he spent in China. Or as Mr. Frank would say “The Orient.”
- C. I can remember many times when I would be teaching Sunday School or a Wednesday night lesson or perhaps making some point in an Elder’s meeting, or a school board meeting, and Mr. Frank would decide it was time for a story about his time in China. And he would take us to China. Now sometimes we didn’t want to go to China. We had material to cover. But Mr. Frank wanted to take us to China, so off to China we went. Frequent were the trips to China.

III. Mr. Frank’s stories always had a point.

- A. It has been observed by someone wiser than me that when men are young, they tend to tell stories about their future. Most of their life is ahead of them, so most of their storytelling is predictive. They talk about what they want to do, what they hope to accomplish, what they believe their life is for.
 - B. And older men tell stories about their past. Most of their life is behind them, so most of their storytelling is memorializing and reflective. They talk about what they've seen, what they've done, what they've learned, and what their life has been about.
 - C. And I only knew Mr. Frank in the latter years, so I knew him as a storyteller. But Mr. Frank's stories were not simply anecdotes for reminiscing. They always had a point. They always made a point—and quite persuasively I might add. And that's what most of our stories do, they make a point or an argument or express a conviction. So it was with Mr. Frank's stories. They had a kind of proverbial quality to them. And they always made you think. Even if some point of it confused you (which let's be honest, sometimes they did), it still had some point you were supposed to take from it.
- IV. Mr. Frank's story is a story about Jesus Christ
- A. When I think about the purpose and value of storytelling as an art, I cannot help but think of Jesus. He often spoke in

parables, Which are stories that had a point, though sometimes we are told that the point was actually to confuse and disorient those who you might say were refusing to hear in faith. Or even “Listening in arrogance.”

- B. As best I can tell, Mr. Frank told stories with a point because he wanted people to examine their lives and their thinking.
- C. And all of you are gathered here today to bid farewell to Mr. Frank because he meant something to you. As a father or a teacher or a friend. And I can think of no better way to honor an old story-teller than to tell you why his own story is the way it was.
- D. Frank Elliott was a believer in Jesus Christ first of all, and to the very end. Mr. Frank’s life is part of a larger story of a God who created everything. A story about our first parents, and how they fell into sin and brought the curse of death into the world. A story about how the nations were made and how there are common bonds that unite all men so that stories from every other part of the world can still resonate with us even if we have not been there.
- E. But the story of the Bible, which is the story that defined and shaped Frank’s life and Nelda’s life is a story that confronts the most pressing and weighty questions of life. One of those being what do we do with death.

F. I don't have to tell you that especially at times like this when we gather for a funeral or a memorial service, it is the unavoidable question that presses its way into our souls, uninvited. We try to silence it with expressions like "Death is natural" and "We all die in the end." Which is not the way we handle things before death, ordinarily. If someone is diagnosed with cancer, we do not serenely smile and say "Well. Cancer is natural. We all have cells, after all, and some of them go bad." No one talks this way.

G. Nor should we talk this way about death. The Bible has three things to say about death:

1. That it is not natural
2. That it is not the end
3. That it is not immortal

V. Death is not natural

A. As I said a moment ago, one of the cliched phrases that we might be tempted to use at some times is "Well, death is natural."

B. Even as you say it, you know it's not true. Even as you say it, your heart screams and rages. In John, Chapter 11, when Jesus comes to the grave of Lazarus the first thing he does is weep. Death is not natural. Death is so much against "the way of things" that God himself weeps at a graveside. Forever dignifying our grief—it is not only ok to grieve it is necessary for healthy souls.

C. I'm sure if Mr. Frank was still on this side of glory, he could educate us all on the rituals of grief and mourning in oriental cultures. All cultures have them, after all. Why? Because we all need some sort of way to express our constant hatred of death, and we do so with the confidence that even Christ himself weeps.

D. So no, death is not natural. It is an invader in this world. We were created to live forever. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that the Lord has put eternity into our hearts. That's why death is so grievous. So disorienting. So out of place among a people who were created for eternity's story.

VI. Death is not the end.

A. Hebrews 9:27 tells us that it is appointed to man to die once and then comes the judgment.

B. How different that is from the often expressed sentiment "Well, we all die in the end." No, hardly. Rather, "We all die before the end." Death is not the end. Death is not the extinguishing of existence. It is the separation of body and soul, while both await the day of the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. But death is not the end. It is the interlude. It is simply the bridge between two stories, the first of which is actually but a brief prologue to the story yet to be written in eternity when we will forget how to count up days and years because such things won't have any meaning anymore.

C. Death is the end of our temporary earthly labor. But it is not the end of all things. Hardly. It is, rather, the last word before the Real Beginning.

VII. Death is not immortal

A. That sounds odd. What I mean is that Mr. Frank placed his hope and his faith in Jesus Christ, who by his death on the cross has put death to death. Death is not immortal. Death is not around forever. Death is bleeding out. And one day, death will be crushed, and we will laugh about death as a distant memory, the way Mr. Frank laughed about distant stories of his earliest years.

B. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15

1. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:
2. "Death is swallowed up in victory."
3. "O death, where is your victory?"
4. O death, where is your sting?"

C. Theologian Ben Askins once observed "Death is swallowed up in the triumphant victory of Jesus Christ, and His victory over death becomes our victory over death when we believe Him. This hope of victory over even death itself can be found in no other name than that of Jesus Christ, for there is no other God but Him. The difference between dying alone and dying while trusting in Christ is like the

difference between being run over by a truck and being run over by the shadow of a truck.”

D. So death is not immortal. In fact Paul tells us—also in 1 Corinthians 15—that the last enemy to be destroyed...is death.

E. In other words, on the last day, the day of judgment, when the dead rise, Jesus will give to his own life immortal in the New Heavens and the New Earth, and all who have rejected him, ignored him, cursed him, made little of him, and chosen instead to elect themselves to the position of God will face the final judgment, along with death itself.

F. So death is not immortal. It is an enemy of God. And one day, it will be crushed, along with all the other enemies of God.

VIII. Perhaps this sounds like a harsh ending to God’s story.

A. But if we are honest, we all want that ending. All the best stories end with the wicked getting crushed. It’s the story we all want. We just don’t want to believe that we are on the side of the wicked. We don’t want to believe that we are the villains in the story.

B. Mr. Frank loved to tell stories, and he had many.

C. So what will yours be? What is your story now? How will the final paragraphs of your short prologue read?

D. Mr. Frank once told me he enjoyed it when we would confess together the text of the first question of the

Heidelberg Catechism. If you're not familiar with it, it's a profound question followed by a profound answer. It goes like this:

1. Question: What is your only comfort in life and death?
2. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

E. Mr. Frank's life was a life shaped by the greatest story of them all. Of a people condemned to death, rescued by the Son of God. Forgiven of all their sins by his own blood. His death became their death. When he was burned, all their sins were buried. And when he rose again, they rose up with him, with the promise of life everlasting.

F. And if your story is not shaped by that story, I can think of no better way to honor Frank than to say to you "Repent of your sin today and your efforts to write your own story. To be your own god. To dictate your own terms. To save your

own life and give it meaning. And instead, come and welcome to Jesus Christ.