

IN NOMINE IESU

God's ways are not our ways. God allowed the last few years of Duane's life on this earth to be as they were. God allowed Duane to suffer a crippling disease of the mind. He allowed Duane's family and friends to watch him deteriorate into a shell of his former self. Gone from our eyes are his easy smiles and his passion of the outdoors. God's ways are not our ways.

We would have had Duane live to ripe old age, full of vigor and life. We would have had Duane continue on, even outliving us. We say it is a shame that he died, unable to say good-bye to family and friends. We say we don't know why God allowed this to happen. But that is selfish and a lie. It is only for our sakes, not Duane's that we want him to have continued life on this earth, because we miss him. It is only for our own peace of mind that we want him to have remembered us and spoken to us. And we do know why these things happened; for the wages of sin is death.

Duane was a sinner just as you and I are sinners; born without true fear and knowledge of God. We are inclined to sin from birth. We are born lost and condemned persons. We toil and fret all to no avail. Our works do not matter and our days are but a hair's breadth. The number of our years is seventy or even by reason of strength, eighty. But God is merciful.

Why should Duane have had to suffer the pain of watching his family and friends die? Why should he have had to suffer the sorrow of knowing that he was sick, unable to care for himself or for his mother like he used to? Why should he have had to remember the pain of losing his father or of never knowing a wife? Who are we to tell God what to do or when or how to call home one of His children? God's ways are not our ways.

But in God's ways, there is mercy. The Lord has spared Duane the pain of watching the death of his mother and family. The Lord has spared him the agony of recognizing the pain on his mother's face or the embarrassed smile from family and friends, as they did not know what to do since Duane did not speak back to them and often seemed as if he did not know who they were. There is mercy here even for us, in that the Lord has kept us from knowing if Duane suffered from any pain before the Lord Jesus called him home. The Lord is merciful.

And His mercy never ends. But the Lord's ways are not our ways. For God does not show mercy as we would have Him do, but instead He is merciful to you by putting to death His only-begotten Son. The Lord is merciful in that He became one of us, a man, subject to pain and hurt, heartache and loss. He became one with us, He became our Immanuel, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, so that He could die our death for us, and give to us His life. That is the mercy of God.

And Duane knew this. Duane knew this when he buried his father, Emanuel. He knew this when he watched his brother marry and his sister marry. He knew this as he met his nephew and niece for the first time. He knew this when he first began to forget things. He knew this when he was diagnosed with a degenerative brain disorder. He knew this when he was admitted into the care of medical professionals. Duane knew that the mercy of God was not in the temporary healing of this sin-ridden body, but rather God's mercy is in permanently healing this body; restoring it, re-creating it in the image and likeness of His Son, Jesus, through the resurrection of the dead.

But there is little comfort in what Duane knew because the disease that afflicted him so took his mind. What comfort is there in what is lost? Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus that He is our Shepherd, our Comfort, our Consolation.

For greater than what Duane knew, is that God knows Duane. It was God who fashioned him in his mother's womb and knit his bones together. It was his heavenly Father who crafted his smile and set the number of hairs on his head. It was God who gave him breath in his lungs and life in his veins. And it is God who remembered Duane even when Duane's mind could not remember. For such is our Lord's promise: "I go to prepare a place for you...and I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also."

In the holy waters of Baptism, the Lord Jesus claimed Duane as one of His own, just as He claimed you as one of His own. He put His seal on him and you. And like a woman who searches for a lost gold coin and rejoices when it is found, like a man who joyfully gives everything he has to buy a field with a precious treasure, Jesus rejoices in you. Neither Duane, nor you, nor the coin try to be found, but Jesus comes and finds His sheep and leads them home.

He gives everything up, even His life, to redeem you, to buy you back from the grave into which your body will be laid. And He does so with great joy and pleasure, for He is passionate about you and about all whom He has marked as His own.

We mourn the loss of our dearly departed brother, but God does not mourn. For precious in the eyes of God is the death of His saints. For the saints of God know the truth, that they have life in Jesus' name and so they joyfully follow Him into the tomb, for He is the way to the Father. For since God raised Jesus from the dead, He will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.

The Lord has placed an open door before our face that no one is able to shut. It is the open door of the empty tomb. For just as our Lord preceded Duane in death, so He precedes Duane, and all the saints, in life. He is the first and the last and He is able to keep Duane through Alzheimer's and the loss of all desire and even in death. For Jesus has never lost His desire for Duane, and He will never lose His desire for you.

He will never stop loving you. He will never stop chasing you. He will never stop wanting you. He will never stop saving you. That is His promise. Even before you know good from evil, right from wrong, before you are weaned from your mother's milk, the Lord Jesus desires to have you and so moves to save you from your sins and write His name upon your forehead and upon your heart so that you are a pillar in the Temple of God.

Thus did our Lord promise Duane; thus does He promise you. Duane has gone the way of his Lord, laying his head down in the sleep of death, so that he may go the way of the Lord in the resurrection from the dead. He knows the truth, that he is with Jesus in Paradise this day, and he knows that his life is Jesus' life. Just as Jesus rose from the dead through the glory of the Father, so too will Duane and all the saints rise from the dead, bringing glory to God in the highest.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠