

If You Had Been Here
Sermon for Funeral of Jason Henselin
Psalm 70, Romans 8, John 11:21-27
May 20, 2011

Agnes, Lisa, Pam, Ben, family, and friends, grace and peace be yours today in Jesus Christ, the One who died and has been raised to new life so that Jay, and you and I may have new life in his name. Amen.

This is not right. We shouldn't be here today. You shouldn't have to wonder what went wrong. You shouldn't have to wonder how this happened or what you could have done differently. And yet, and yet, here we are...grieving the premature loss of a husband, a brother, a cousin, an uncle, a co-worker and friend. This simply shouldn't be the case today. It isn't right that we say goodbye so soon and it isn't right that Jay had to die the way he did. Today, I imagine that there isn't a single emotion that sits with you, but many...sadness, fear, grief, anger, numbness, relief, frustration and the emotions go on. Let me say that whatever you are feeling is what you need to feel at this moment. Odds are, over the next several weeks, you'll feel all of the emotions I just mentioned and more.

There were some others that felt this same complexity of emotions in the Bible. Mary and Martha were sisters and their brother Lazarus had gotten sick. They called for their friend Jesus. He was known to be able to heal people, and as a friend, surely he would come and make Lazarus well again. But Jesus didn't come, Jesus didn't make it in time and Lazarus died. His sisters were furious; angry that their brother had died, angry that the Lord had not gotten to them in time, just plain angry that they were now in the situation they were in. Martha slung this accusation at Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died".

If...if...if, it is such a small, seemingly insignificant word, yet it leads us down a trail of impossible alternatives to the one we are faced with today. You may have wondered over the last week, "If I had just done this or not done that..." or "If I had just said this to Jason" or "If I had just listened to him things could have been different". As much as we wish these ifs could change things today, there is little we can do to change the scenario. What we can do is change the way we perceive what we are experiencing today. I drove by a sign yesterday that said, "Anything is possible with hope." But where does this hope come from? You may not feel very hopeful today. You may feel like all is lost. But I stand here today to testify that in Jesus, there is always hope.

When Jesus heard the anger and the frustration and the pain from both Martha and her sister Mary about their brother's death, Jesus responded not only with a word of hope but a promise. It is a promise that we can trust. Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again because I am the resurrection and the life; anyone who believes in me even though they die will have life." Now I know that Jason wasn't much of a church person, but that doesn't mean that he didn't have a connection with God and it certainly doesn't mean that God doesn't care for Jay. Jesus has come to us to restore the deep pains in our lives, the kinds of pains and wrongs, the disappointments and hurts that we live with everyday. Jesus comes to us when we are broken and ashamed and Jesus reaches out to us with healing and promise that by his death, there is no power in death. Because of Jesus, nothing, not anything we have done or not done, can separate us from the love of God. This is God's master plan for the whole world.

From what I understand, the church had failed Jay during his lifetime, the message he often heard was more about judgment and hypocrisy than it was about a God who embraces us in our most troubling of circumstances and desires to transform us into a new create. Jason trusted in a power beyond himself that always sought goodness, love and kindness. He lived a life of open honesty. In one case he wrote "It is better to live as an open sinner than a false saint." Jesus asks nothing less of us, to admit what is broken in our lives so that by the power of God's love in Jesus we can be made whole again.

In the midst of the pain, the sadness, the wonder about Jay's death; there is still much to celebrate and remember about his life. Jay was a hard worker who often went beyond the call of duty to make sure those he was working with were happy. He seemed to be in his element when he was able to create. He was happy whether he was in the kitchen cooking or outside making the yard look beautiful. Perhaps Jay never saw himself as an artist, maybe beyond anything else he did for a living this was his calling. Perhaps if things had been different for him, he would have had eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to believe that he had something important to offer the world in his ability to create beauty.

Jason also had a love for animals. When Agnes and he were married, Jason adopted Agnes' dogs as if they were his own. He and Agnes treated their dogs like their kids and when one of their beloved dogs died a couple years ago, he took it as hard as he would take the loss of a family member. Jason's love for animals showed a sensitive side of him, a compassionate side of him; a side of his personality that perhaps many people didn't see. There wasn't always much room for sensitivity and compassion in his life. But during times in Jason's life, he made room for kindness, compassion and

gentleness. Pam was telling me that not too long ago she and Caleb were at Jay and Agnes' house and Jay got out a play tool set and the two of them fixed the fence in the back yard together. This was a tender moment between nephew and uncle.

It isn't fair that there won't be more moments like this, that Caleb won't know his uncle Jay. That is the sting of death for all of us. We come to the realization that our lives will go on without this one who meant so much to us. This is why Mary and Martha were so mad and Jesus for not coming sooner to save their brother. They realized that they would have to go on without him. They would have to make new memories that did not include him. Yet Jesus would not let death have the final word. And today, Jay's death does not have the final word. Jesus will not let it be so. Like the death of Lazarus, Jesus weeps with us today. He loves us. He loves Jay. And like Lazarus, Jesus too has rolled the stone away and reveals a burial place that will not be used long.

I believe that in Jay's death, he is now able to see what he could not in this life. That he is loved, that he is cherished, that he is worth more than he could ever imagine. And I know, that today by the power of God's love, Jay is unbound and free...Let this be so for us as well... Amen.