

Grace Evangel Fellowship Pulpit

LIFE IS NOT FAIR ... BUT! (FOR JEN)

A Message

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This is one of my favorite photos of Jen ... she and Jill on one of their outings.

Jen has been our daughter since she married our oldest son Cris nearly 23 years ago. When she died the week before Christmas, she left a hole in our family that nothing can ever fill. Yes, we will carry on. With the large family we're blessed with there is much living to be done and much joy to be enjoyed, but there will always be a void where Jen once was. But we give thanks to God for bringing her into our family and for being such a blessing to us all!

Jill and I have known Jen since she was a young college girl – full of energy, hope, and a love for life.

Back then we never locked our doors, and our home was often filled with our five children and many of their friends. Jen was one of them.

A cherished memory from those days was our Sunday evening tradition. I began making Egg McMuffins for any who happened to be around at the time. I kept cranking them out until the demand ceased. Jen precociously asked, "Could I just have scrambled eggs with cheese?" Of course I accommodated! I would give Jen a hard time when she smothered the delicacy with ketchup, and she would just smile. Every Sunday evening, I would make a LOT of Egg McMuffins ... and a single helping of scrambled eggs with cheese for Jen.

Jen fell in love with our son, Cris – and since our home is situated just a block away from the Asbury College campus, we saw her a lot and got to know her quite well. And, at some point – we began to love her.

Jen and Cris were married on May 5, 2001. On that day our family grew by one. And from that day Jill & I loved Jen as if she were our own daughter. She began to call us "Mom" and "Dad" ... and we called her ... Jen.

As our other four children married, we added to our family. Jen was the first to be grafted-in, but then came Sharon, Molly, Jason, and Martha. We love them all as if they were our own children. And so, our five children multiplied into ten ... and they became great friends with one another – true brothers and sisters, and the best of friends.

I vividly remember meeting Cris & Jen for breakfast at a place in Lexington called Doodles. That was the time they shared with us that a child was coming ... our first

grandchild. And I so clearly remember getting the news and visiting at the hospital when Elinor was born. And then a few years later came Lilli, and later still Max.

I recently re-read a beautiful account that Jill had written about Jen and Cris as they faced a grueling daily schedule when Lilli was going thru her leukemia treatments. It reminded me of what a strong and brave woman Jen was as she faced the worries and exhaustions thru those days of uncertainty – and what a great mother she was!

Others have already shared a good number of memories, so I will hold back to allow time for some other important thoughts. But I will say that we have thousands upon thousands of photographs of Jen amidst our family thru the years.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so our thousands of photographs compute into a LOT of words and therefore a LOT of wonderful memories. Family dinners to celebrate birthdays, holidays, or no special purpose other than to gather to share a meal. Impromptu visits at our home. Impromptu dinners at Drakes if Jill and I would happen to get the big table and would text Cris and Jen ... whereupon they would almost invariably gather up the kids and meet us.

So many great times as the years went quickly by – culminated by a wonderful family vacation in the Colorado Rockies, just a year and a half ago, when we rented a reunion cabin, and all of our kids and grandkids made the trip out for a week of hiking and family fun.

We could peruse our thousands of photographs and tell you thousands of stories about our precious memories. But for now, we simply cherish these many wonderful memories in our hearts.

But all this to say, Jen is so precious to us – and she always will be.

If I might make an observation it would be this ... life is not fair! Life is NOT fair!

A year and a half ago I lost my father. He was 99 years and four months old and lived his long life experiencing little illness. Jen had only 45 years, with the last year and a half largely revolving around doctor visits and treatments and pain.

The unfairness and inequity we encounter is a reality we live with, though I wish it were not so. And when we consider the unfairness of life we tend to ask, “Why?”

Many try to bring comfort by sharing why they think bad things have happened. But none of us really knows, do we?

When Job experienced trial upon trial, loss upon loss, three friends came to “console” him – attempting to explain why these things had happened to Job. But after they speak to Job at great length, God rebukes them in the 38th chapter – noting that they have words without knowledge. In other words, they have no clue – and should not try to render an explanation.

In retrospect, they should have simply sat with Job in silence, bringing some level of comfort through their simple presence – rather than providing advice they had no ability to provide.

Why do bad things happen to us? We don't know! But we are told in the Scriptures a few general things about this age in which we live.

First, as the Apostle Paul shares in Romans 8,

The entire creation is groaning and travailing together until now. Yet not only so, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruit of the spirit, we ourselves also, are groaning in ourselves, awaiting the sonship, the deliverance of our body.

(Romans 8:22-25)

Groaning ... travailing ... awaiting the deliverance. This is where we are in the process – in the midst of God's unfolding progressive plan.

Second, we are reminded in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that in this present eon – this present age – the “god of this eon” (as Satan – the Deceiver – is called) is at work. Yes, Satan is on the loose! He blinds the apprehensions of the unbelieving. He deceives and distorts. He works counter to God's ultimate plans. Until God deals with the Deceiver and defeats him fully in the end, he is at work in this world.

And third, ever since Adam's fall, mankind has inherited his weakness – his mortality. These bodies of flesh break down. They fail us. They are subject to disease and infirmity and weakness. And we ultimately face death.

As the Bible tells us, Death is the enemy. Death is ALWAYS the enemy. Death steals. It steals health. It steals our loved ones. It robs us of our friends. And eventually we, too, face this wretched enemy. At times death may grant mercy to those severely suffering. It may grant rest and freedom from pain and suffering. But it is always a ruthless enemy that robs and steals.

Now, having recapped this dismal view of what we face in this world, there is a light that lies ahead. The Scriptures remind us that death has been overcome. Christ Jesus demonstrated God's power to overcome death – and this resurrection power lies ahead for us as well!

Christ's resurrection is not just a major historical event – it is a demonstration of what lies ahead for Jen, and for all of us.

The Apostle Paul once stated that if this life is all that there is, we are to be pitied. But he goes on to stress that this life is NOT all that there is! From 1 Corinthians 15:

If we are having an expectation in Christ in this life only,
More forlorn than all men are we.
Yet ... Christ has been roused from among the dead,
The Firstfruit of those who are reposing. (1 Cor 15:19-21)

Paul proceeds to tell us the implications of Christ's resurrection ...

For since, in fact, through a man came death,
Through a Man, also, comes the resurrection of the dead.

For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified.

Yet each in his own class: the Firstfruit, Christ; thereupon those who are Christ's in His presence;

Thereafter the consummation, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power.

For He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet.

The last enemy is being abolished: death.

And then Paul proceeds to tell us of the climax of human history that lies ahead!

When all are subjected to the Lord – Christ Jesus,
And when God the Father becomes All in all. (1 Corinthians 15:28)

All in all! Think about that! God is to become **All in all!** Death, the last enemy, finally defeated. Every knee bowing to the Creator.

As the Psalmist observes:

Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy cometh in the morning. (Psalm 30:5)

Colossians is one of Paul's final letters and, alongside Ephesians, it reveals God's highest truth. And in Colossians chapter 1 we read that,

In Christ, all is created,
That in the heavens and that on the earth,
The visible and the invisible,

And through Christ, **to reconcile all** to Him,
Whether those on the earth or those in the heavens. (Colossians 1:16-20)

This, then, is the global reconciliation with God of His entire creation. This is what lies ahead, in the timing of God's choosing.

God is sovereign. And this means the outcome is guaranteed. **The outcome is guaranteed!** Nothing can thwart God's plan to totally dispose of death – to resurrect us on the day of His choosing – to bring life that will not again face death!

Yes, there will most certainly come a day when, as John writes in the Book of Revelation,

He will be brushing away every tear from their eyes.
And death will be no more,
Nor mourning, nor clamor, nor misery;
They will be no more, for the former things passed away. (Revelation 21:4)

There will be life not only as we know it today, but life immortal. Immortal bodies. Incorruptible bodies. Never to see death again.

We cannot answer the why's of what we presently face. Why do things happen as they do? Why must there be suffering and separation and death? We cannot answer these questions. And we don't know how long before God completes His plan, bringing about the amazing conclusion to our stories.

But consider what we DO know.

God is sovereign,
His plan will be accomplished.
There will be a time when there are no more tears or suffering or pain or death.
There will be a day of resurrection.
We will inherit immortality, and incorruptible bodies.
We will be fully reconciled to God with the rest of His creation.

Yes, there will be a day of resurrection. Christ demonstrated this! His resurrection is the precursor of what we, too, will experience.

And because we know these things – because these things have been *guaranteed* by God as revealed to us in His Word – we will not mourn as those who have no hope; no expectation.

This does not mean we will not mourn in these present days. We will mourn. We DO mourn! We weep! We groan and travail! But, not as those that have no expectation, because we know what lies ahead! As Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians:

We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren concerning those who are reposing (who are asleep), lest you may sorrow according as the rest, also, who have no expectation.

For, if we are believing that Jesus died and rose, thus also those who are put to repose, will God, through Jesus, lead forth together with Him.

For this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord, that we, the living, who are surviving to the presence of the Lord, should by no means outstrip those who are put to repose,

For the Lord Himself will be descending from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Chief Messenger, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall be rising first.

Thereupon we, the living who are surviving, shall at the same time be snatched away together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.

And thus shall we always be together with the Lord. So that, console one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Because we do have this expectation as revealed in God's Word, we know what lies ahead – a glorious future on that future day has been assured.

Today, Jen sleeps. No longer in pain. Shielded from worry. Awaiting the sound of the trumpet of the Lord – on that future day.

Her legacy is here in this room today. Three children that *are* and will always be a part of their mother. A loving husband. Her family and her many friends.

All of us in this room today have been touched in some way by Jen and have been influenced and shaped in some way by her life, her love, her tender heart. We not only cling to the many memories of Jen – but we carry a part of her with us in who we are!

And even more than these memories and this legacy she leaves us with – we are again reminded that there is more. As a friend of mine likes to say, “Life is grand – and then there’s more!”

Some years ago, Jen and Jill organized a workshop in Lexington that included other family members. They all painted bourbon barrel lids. For hers, Jen chose the title of her favorite hymn, “It Is Well With My Soul.” Her creation continues to hang on her dining room wall to this day – an ever-present reminder that despite the circumstances we encounter, it is well with my soul!

Most assuredly this life is NOT all that there is. And one day, when the trumpet sounds, when the resurrection becomes a reality for Jen and for all of us – we will not only be in the presence of the Lord – but also in the presence of one another. This is assured! It is *guaranteed* by the sovereign, powerful, loving Creator. And what a day of reunion that will be!



This overview contains the thoughts and opinions of the author and is a work in progress as his study of the Scriptures continues. Some things that God has revealed are very clear. That Christ died for our sins; that He was entombed; and that He was roused (1 Corinthians 15:3) is clear. That all are to be ultimately reconciled to God thru the work of Christ is also very clear (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). But on many specifics in the Scriptures there are a variety of interpretations and opinions, and none should conclude they have the complete and final understanding on these matters that are less clear. The reader is encouraged to consider various opinions, but to study and to think for himself. Within the Body of Christ we should study and discuss our understandings so as to mutually reach a more complete understanding of that which God has revealed.

Unless otherwise noted, Scriptures are taken from the Concordant Literal New Testament and the Concordant Version of the Old Testament. Concordant Publishing Concern, P O Box 449, Almont, MI 48003 (Concordant.org)

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