

For the funeral of Charles Shores
June 9, 2007
John 11: 21-27
Maria Hoecker, preacher

*I am the resurrection and the life,
they who believe in me, though they die,
yet shall they live, and everyone
whom lives and believes in me shall never die.*

This is the fundamental fact of our faith - Jesus is Lord of the Living and The Dead, by him, the dead receive new life, and through faith in him, the living never die.

Good words to be sure, but what do *we* have to say about this today?

In just a few months, Charlie Shores went from being a robust man full of life to a frail shell of a man. I never knew Charlie in his robust days. I came to know him through the suffering that came at the end of his life. I came to know him by his loving family who lovingly circled in around him in his last days, his children, his siblings --Charlie was the youngest of seven and the first of them to die. I came to know Charlie through Pat, his faithful wife and devoted caregiver.

Our last good conversation came a few weeks ago when we spent a few hours together on a Sunday afternoon. We talked of his years in the military service, and all the many meals that he planned and prepared for others. Charlie devoted his life to hospitality. He loved his work. It was his life-long vocation. He was a great cook. He served thousands of people. Spent the afternoon together, and after a simple home communion outside we sat in his RV and talked about how much he enjoyed traveling. Charlie saw many places, was a friend to many, many people. There were still a lot of places he still wanted to see. Toward the end of our conversation he generously offered to let me and the kids borrow his RV for the weekend. That's when I knew that Charlie was starting to let go. He was beginning to accept that he would not be going camping anymore. He took joy in offering to me what he had so enjoyed. That act of hospitality touched me deeply.

Pat has lovingly tended to Charlie during these days of physical suffering. He died a peaceful and holy death.

What can we say when those we love die? When people around us ache and are in despair? We are tempted to say - as did Israel in the time of Exile: "our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, we are cut off completely.." ? It feels that way sometimes.

Do we give up hope as did Mary and Martha in the village of Bethany? Do we say with them: "Lord, if you had been here, our brother Lazarus would not have died"?

Or do we wait - in trust - for the next loving and powerful act of our God? Really, when you are enduring a suffering existence, you know about waiting. All that you can do is wait, keep watch--surrender to God's will. That's why those who suffer and those who mourn are the blessed ones. They know at a deep level that they are not able to proceed a single step further on their own. They know that they do not control their future.

Now its time for a confession. My confession is this. In the arrogance I acquire in times of health and prosperity I limit my God almost every day. Indeed I lock up God - much as Lazarus was bound and locked in the tomb.

Of course I still believe in God - I'd say most of us here believe in God. Charlie believed in God, though he, like

many fine folks I know, didn't think that it needed to be talked about all that much.

We say it every week .

- We believe that God - in Jesus - forgives our sins
- We believe that God will bring us into eternal life
- We believe that God performs miracles --people are healed, people are saved, people are made new - every day.

Yet still, sooner or later, living life hurts us at a profound level. People die, people suffer loss. We hurt or we hurt those that we love the most in life. By our lack of faithful imagination we make feeble attempts to control our fate, in doing so we attempt to confine our God into a box.

Do you remember, in a deeper reading of the eleventh chapter of John, the story of the raising of Lazarus? How he comes forth from the tomb, with his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth? How Jesus tells the people - unbind him and let him go?

Well it is the same with us -Like Lazarus, we have been raised to a new life with Christ--raised to a new life by virtue of our faith in him, by virtue of our baptism. With every day we have a new chance to live life here on this planet as God desires for us to live.

Jesus is the lord of both the living and the dead,
He is the resurrection and the life
those who believe in him,
though they die, will live,
and everyone who lives and believes in him will never die.

This is our faith, the one that we need to be reminded of during times like these. This faith brings solace when we feel that we are sinking into despair. This faith pulls us out of our dwelling places mired in anger and arrogance. God breaks the chains that bind us into our small boxes of prosperity, false idols, and strong wills. God will not be put into any box. In death we are freed from those same boxes in which we attempt to put our God.

The promise that we Christians have every day of our lives is that we will never die. Charlie Shores is not dead. He freely dwells now with a cloud of witness which surround us always. A communion of saints. Thanks be to God, in this life and the next we are never separated from the love of God that we have through Jesus Christ.

Hail this Festival Day. To God be all glory - now and forevermore. Amen