



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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James 4:14 "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."

This verse has been hanging around in my thoughts for the past few days. As always, there is a story behind this. My wife and I were out on Saturday running around, hitting stores and so forth. It was past noon and I was ready to head home. One of our older members, just a dear, dear saint, was in an assisted living not far from where we were. She is kind, sweet and just a jewel. My wife has visited her often. She wanted to pop in and see her. I really didn't. I just wanted to go home. We went to the assisted living home. We had a wonderful visit with this Christian. She's old. She'd tell that she's old. We laughed. We talked about her family, which is dear to me. We talked about the church. She wanted to know about our family. As we were ready to go, my wife asked her if she would like to sing a hymn. She smiled and said, "Oh, yes!" We suggested, "Jesus loves me," to which she said that was one of her favorite hymns. She closed her eyes and sang so wonderfully. We hugged. Had a prayer. Kissed and left.

Less than two hours after we left, she suffered a massive stroke. Four days later, she went through that door of death. We were the last ones to have a meaningful conversation with her. And, I was not wanting to go visit her. How terrible I felt for thinking those thoughts. One of her sons served as a shepherd when I was first hired by this congregation. Another son and his wife have gone on multiple vacations with us. Our hearts are connected dearly to these good people.

Some thoughts:

First, one never knows when the last time will be the last time. We sure didn't. Had we known what was about to happen, we would have stayed, prayed harder, and called for help. There was simply no indication that our conversation would be the final conversation. Over dinner the other day, we went back through that last conversation. We wrote out to the best of our memory what all was said and have given that to one of her sons. I have known others to leave for work in the morning, but death called before they ever made it back home that evening. It sure makes one realize how precious and how fragile life is.

(OVER)

Second, as I thought about our conversation, how meaningful it was that one of the final things we did was to sing a hymn and pray to the Lord. I sure wish I could go out that way. Thoughts of the Lord and a hymn in my heart, something this dear Christian believed for so many years. Her children and their mates, all Christians, the next generation, nearly all Christians, is such a powerful tribute to what really matters in life. James, in our passage today, reminds us of the morning fog or vapor. It's there for a while, but most times, it's gone by noon. It just doesn't last long. So, too, is our time together. We can spend that time making one another mad or using that for opportunity to encourage, grow closer to one another and know the Lord more. We could have talked about ballgames. We could have talked about politics. We could have talked about the price of food. Instead, and what I am thankful for, is that we talked about the Lord. She knew the Lord. We know the Lord. Together, there is much to share.

Third, when her son called early this morning, to tell me of her passing, I wondered just what all she was seeing. I wondered if she would run into my dad. I expect that she was smiling today. I know she was being comforted today. Safe in the arms of Jesus, what a beautiful thought and what a wonderful place our faith takes us. We can get wrapped up with earthbound thinking and talking so much that we forget the better side of life. It isn't on this planet, it's with the Lord. Our passage says, "You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow." Oh, there is a tomorrow. We all have a tomorrow. That tomorrow might be right here. Or, that tomorrow might be on the other side of the door of death. Either way, there is a tomorrow. And what you do today, shapes and colors what that tomorrow will look like for you.

A lifetime of believing. A heart that centered upon the Lord. A soul that loved Jesus. A mom that raised her children to know the Lord. A grandmother who cherished little hearts and little voices that now have grown to be men and women of God. She left footprints. She was an example. Her kind are fewer and fewer these days. One that puts family above self. One that puts integrity above getting ahead. One that has read the Bible over and over and over and whose heart never tired of that wonderful story of our Savior. One that encouraged preachers, like myself. One that was a friend to the fellowship of Christ. One that knew the Lord and the Lord knew her.

Mary Lou Quinn—while we loved her and wanted to call her one of ours, she actually belonged to the Lord. Her citizenship was in Heaven. She had placed a stake in the ground for the Lord a long time ago and there was no moving that stake. And now, she is safely home. She is where she has longed to be. She is where she wants all of us to be.

Bless her dear family. She will be missed. I remember my old grandfather once saying, when I was a kid, "I know more people in Heaven than I do on earth." Back then, I had no idea what he was talking about. I do now. I do today.

Thank you, Lord for allowing her life to touch so many of our lives. We were the ones who benefited. As we smiled and left Mary Lou that Saturday afternoon, we told her that we loved her. Her words to us, the last words she spoke to us, was, "I love you, too." And, on this day, I can see Mary Lou saying to Jesus, "I love you." And, our dear Lord saying to Mary Lou, "I love you, too. I have always loved you."

The Psalmist understood, when he penned, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones." Angels came. A soul was welcomed home. A faith kept. A journey completed.

We do not grieve what we lost, but are thankful for what we had.

Roger Shouse (Used by Permission)

