

"Listen Up, You Young 'Uns" -- Ecclesiastes 12:1-7

30 October Anno Domini 1998

The Divine Service of the Word
in memory of
Walter William Frederick Conrad

Pastor Michael L. McCoy
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho

Dear Wayne, Dale, Mary Ann and Walt's other family members, Walt's friends, neighbors, fellow members of the family of God here at Our Redeemer, and especially you, Beulah his beloved wife,

From ancient Greek mythology, there is a riddle asked of the citizens of Thebes by the Sphinx. The riddle goes like this: "What has one voice and becomes four-footed, two-footed and three-footed?" The answer is "a man" ... four-footed when a crawling baby, two-footed when walking forth in the prime of life, and three-footed when he is old and must walk with a cane.

While we might grin and nod our heads at this, no ones laughs out loud, especially today. This ancient riddle, along with its answer, speaks of a truth that is older than the Sphinx, older than the Pyramids of Egypt and older than the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. This particular truth is, in fact, older than the thorns and thistles growing on this side of Eden's gates. It proceeds from a consequence of Adam's Fall into sin which the Lord God Almighty announced. *For dust thou art; and unto dust thou shalt return (Genesis 3:19).*

This truth is that, if ... if God grants that *the days of our years are threescore and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years (Psalm 90:10)*, or if, in the case of Walt they are one month short of 90 years, the pattern holds true. A human being begins as a crawling baby, walks about on the face of this earth on two feet for awhile, and then employs the use of a walking-stick. Finally, unless taken suddenly by accident or slaying, a man typically is carted about in a chair with wheels before being placed onto his deathbed.

This can all become rather depressing, *if for this life only we have placed our hope in Christ (1 Cor. 15:19)*. But there is more to real life than this life only. If there was nothing else but the answer to the Sphinx's riddle, then we have no business having a Church, I should not be a pastor, there is no such thing as a Christian funeral, and those of you who are Christians are living a pipe-dream. That is, of course, if if there is nothing else.

Walt believed and trusted in the Lord God and was convinced that there was more to life than the limited, decaying time that is lived on this planet called Earth. About twelve years ago he gave me this piece of paper and said that he would like his funeral sermon based upon this text. This piece of paper did not have his name on it, only a particular chapter and a few verses. This slip of paper has been a bookmark in my Bible since the day I received it. Walt wanted you -- both as an assembled

group and each one of you individually and personally -- to hear a sermon based on this text. Therefore, please listen to Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 as we consider the theme ...

... *Listen Up, You Young 'Uns!*"

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain; in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the street are shut; when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low; they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets; before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it.

Thus far the inspired and inerrant Word of the Lord our God.

The Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes was written by a weathered man named Solomon, the Son of David and the King in Jerusalem. Solomon had been involved in the writing of two other books that are included in the Bible. In his God-granted wisdom, a younger Solomon wrote many of the proverbs. In the former days when he was strong physically as well as in the Lord, Solomon wrote the beautiful, soul-stirring, and heart-throbbing *Song of Solomon* or *Song of Songs*.

But now, in the twelve chapters of Ecclesiastes, we hear from an older man ... one who has known and experienced what was God-pleasing and what was not God-pleasing in the life that is lived on this earth. Thus, he says to his readers, "Listen up, you young 'uns, as you think about all the activities that are happening in your lives, as you go about the hustle and bustle of what you think is important, *remember also your Creator in the days of your youth.*"

Now, perhaps you people here today are thinking to yourself, "Ah yes, the days of my youth. Way back then. Indeed, those days of my youth are long past me now." "Not so," says the holy writer, *remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them."* Therefore, according to the Author of Ecclesiastes, your youth consists of all the days of your life which lead up to that time when the days of real trouble come and when the time arrives when you say, "I have no pleasure in the remaining days and years of my life."

Or, as Walt experienced in the last few weeks and what he wanted you to hear today, and as Solomon wrote: "Listen up, you young 'uns, *remember ... your Creator in the days of your youth ... in the day when the keepers of the house tremble -- listen up, before your arms become weak and shake; and the strong men are bent -- remember before your back is hunched over; before the grinders cease because they are few -- before you lose all but a tooth or two; and those that look through the windows are dimmed -- before you are no longer able to see with your eyes; and the doors on the street are shut, before you become a shut-in; when the sound of the grinding is low, listen up before you are no longer able to hear very well; and one rises up at the voice of a bird,*

when your sleep is disturbed, *and the grasshopper drags itself along*, before your legs give out and you have to hobble along.

As I look over this entire assemble congregated here on this day, at this memorial service for Walt Conrad, I do not see a single person among us who has completely reached that failing condition ... not yet, anyway. Relative to what Walt's condition was last week, we are all young. Therefore, "listen up, you young 'uns," *remember ... your Creator in the days of your youth.*

Remember. Fine and dandy, but just what is it us young 'uns are to remember? Well, remember that the Lord God is the Creator of heaven and earth. He is your Creator Who has given you your body and soul, eyes, ears, and all your members, your reason and all your senses and still preserves them; ... and all this purely out of Fatherly, Divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in you; for all which it our duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him.

"No problem," one might reply, "I believe that there is a God." *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder (James 2:19).* So it sounds like there is more to this remembering than just saying "I believe in God."

Well, what else is there to remember? Listen up, you young 'uns, we are all part of a fallen creation. This is what Solomon was attempting to communicate to us in the 12th chapter of Ecclesiastes ... the graphic description of man's progressive physical deterioration as the years roll by. We all have a part in this decaying world. Each one of us is by nature sinful and each one of us transgresses God's holy law each day in thought, in word, and in deed. We deserve nothing from God except His Divine wrath, both now and also forever in hell. Remember that.

Walt would also have you remember something else. He picked the hymn that we will be singing in a few minutes ... "I Know that My Redeemer Lives." That hymn is based upon the Old Testament reading for this day and declares the truth that, in the midst of the decay and death of this world, there is the truth that the Lord God has *no pleasure in the death of any one (Ezekiel 18:32)*, and it is not God's intention that anyone go to hell. So, He has planned for and worked out the salvation which He intends for all.

Therefore, listen up, you young 'uns. The Lord God, in His infinite mercy and loving-kindness, sent His Son to this world to be the Redeemer of all, you and me included. This is the Good News, revealed to us from Genesis through Revelation, and we have come to know that our Redeemer has provided an accomplished salvation. In confirming this Good News, Walt was empowered by the Holy Spirit to confess the truth ...

"I know that my Redeemer lives. I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious Blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own, and live under Him in His Kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity."

And because Jesus lives, risen from the dead, triumphant over the grave, victorious over the devil, conqueror of death, then those who die believing and trusting in Christ live in Heaven with Him,

doing so for all eternity. *The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it.* The repentant thief on the cross, with sorrow in his soul for his many sins, looked to Jesus for forgiveness and petitioned God in faith, *Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom (Luke 23:42).* The Lord replied with the Good News from the cross, *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43).* And for the repentant thief, as for Walt, *the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it.*

It has been my privilege, as pastor here at Our Redeemer, to share that Good News with Walt for many years, but it is especially gratifying to be able to do so recently. At the end of the Christian's life, you really get down to basics and the things that are shared don't have a thing to do with the weather or the price of cattle. Rather, they have to do with the holy things of God. So several weeks ago he desired and received the Lord's Supper, the very Body and the true Blood of Jesus which was given and shed for you for the forgiveness and remission of sins.

Last Thursday, when he could barely work up the strength to whisper a word, he listened as I called him to remember His Creator, His Redeemer, and His Comforter. I spoke the words of the liturgy of the church -- parts of the order of service that he had probably heard and been a part of four thousand times and more during his life ... the invocation which are the gracious words of Holy Baptism, the confession of sins, the declaration of forgiveness, the readings from Scripture, the old Apostles' Creed, the older Lord's Prayer, the Nunc Dimittus (*Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant, depart in peace, according to Thy Word*), and the Benediction (*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace*).

Last Thursday there was no sermon; not even a short devotion ... no analogies, no riddles, no fine points, no clown ministry, no contemporary worship, no spiffy Christian ditties hot off the latest pop charts. He needed the plain, clear ministry of the Word; therefore he only heard what he had been hearing and had been given all his life ... the liturgy of the Word. It's that same service before you in *The Lutheran Hymnal* which are here in the pews.

Last Sunday in Bible class the question was asked, "How long does a person have to trust that Jesus died for their sins, to believe that the Son of God is the Savior?" The answer was spoken by several in our discussion group, "A lifetime." However long or however short a time a person has on this earth, he or she has a lifetime to know, believe, trust, and confess the Savior Jesus.

Solomon wrote the answer like this and remember, this is what Walt wanted you to hear today, so "listen up, you young 'uns, *Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; ... before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.* In other words, dear people, remember this before you die. Take it to heart today. Do not wait until tomorrow. This is not about you making a decision for Christ; this is about the decision He made for you. This is not about you choosing Him; He is the One Who chooses. A man asked, *What must I do to be saved?* The reply was, *Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household (Acts 16:30-31).*

We began today's sermon with a riddle from ancient Greek mythology that conveyed a truth. "What has one voice and becomes four-footed, two-footed and three-footed?" The answer was "a man" and it is an answer that leads to death. Therefore, it is appropriate to end with a riddle from contemporary

Biblical theology which has an answer intended to lead to life. "What has one voice and becomes a believer in Jesus, or remains an active believer in Jesus, or is an unbeliever?" Got the answer? It was a long riddle, so let me repeat it for you. "What has one voice and becomes a believer in Jesus, or remains an active believer in Jesus, or is an unbeliever?"

You ... you figure out the answer to the riddle. So "listen up, you young 'uns," ... you who have still have ears to hear. Listen to what the Lord has given in His Word, to what Solomon wrote, and to what Walt wanted you to hear today.

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them"; ... before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it. Amen.