



WHEN DEATH STINGS

This is the third time, within the last seven months, that our church family has been visited by an unwanted and unwelcome guest – death. Last November, we said “Goodnight” to Tony Reyes. This month, two of our beloved family members – Joseph Ordas and Lenie Rolle – departed from our earth fellowship.

When we are separated from people we love, it is natural to feel sorrow and anguish. Even though death is part and parcel of human existence, we’re never emotionally prepared to deal with it. We see its arrival as undeserved and too soon. Death not only comes as an end to someone’s life, it also comes to snatch away something quite precious from those of us who are left behind. We lose a big part of our lives – a parent, a brother or sister, a child, a friend, a spouse or lover.

So we are never quite the same. The routines and adventures of our lives that involve the deceased loved one are no longer possible. Death leaves a void in our hearts that causes us seemingly endless and insufferable pain. This is the “sting” of death. And we all are afflicted by it in a terrible way at this moment as we mourn the shocking and sudden passing of Lenie.

But we need to remember that death is not God’s plan for His creatures. His enemy is the one who comes to steal, kill and destroy. God sent His Son Jesus Christ to give us life in its fullness (**John 10:10**). The truth is this: the Lord’s loved ones are very precious to Him and it grieves Him when they die (**Psalms 116:15**). Right now, Jesus grieves with Gospel Life over the passing of Joe and Lenie.

The Scriptures tell us that Christ’s followers are not to be like the unbelievers when they lose a loved one. They mourn without hope. We – those who believe in Jesus Christ – mourn in a different way – we mourn with hope. And because of Jesus we can grieve and celebrate at the same time.

How is this possible? Let me just share with you, especially with Leonard, who had just lost his beloved mother, some reasons why we can both mourn and celebrate the death of Lenie.

First, you do not need to deny your grief because you are not alone in your grief. The poet, John Donne said, “*No man is an island. Every one is a piece of the continent, a part of the main . . . Every man’s death diminishes me, send not for whom the bells tolls, it tolls for thee.*” You are not alone. **This is the blessing: God sends people to love you in your time of need.** As we grieve, we come closer to those who grieve with us.

Second, you can face your grief because you have lots of good memories of the good times you’ve had with Lenie. Death does not take away your memories of the good times you’ve had with Lenie. Often, while a loved one is still living, we seldom think of the good that they do. It is when a person is gone, when we miss her, that we

are compelled to recall the good times. In the case of Lenie, it is not too difficult for us to recall the great things that we enjoyed and admired about her. When we see her in this light, we think more of her life rather than her passing. It was a fully-lived life, a life of loving service and devotion to her children and grandchildren and her church family. Our mourning for her death becomes a blessing when it leads us into a celebration of her life.

Third, you can face sorrow because you are sustained by your faith in a God who is loving and merciful. As Christians, we have the confidence that Jesus died for our sins on Calvary. Sin has been vanquished by Jesus. By faith, we can face sin’s results (like death, disease, suffering and pain), with courage and dignity.

We have lost Lenie. Yes, this is a time for us to weep and to mourn because we will miss her. But it is also a time for us to laugh and to celebrate because we remember her as someone who lived her life with love and sacrifice for those she loved and who brought happiness to the lives of those around her. The Bible assures us that Lenie can now worship in presence of our Lord (**Philippians 1:21-22**).

Fourth, We mourn today but we look forward to the future. In the Earth made new, we will never be separated from Lenie throughout eternity. God will live with us, and we will be His people (**Revelation 21:1-4**).

The hardest thing to do in this world is to place a final kiss on cold lips that cannot kiss in return. Yes, the hardest thing to do in our world is to say goodbye. In the new earth, the apostle John says in Revelation that “goodbye” will never be spoken again.

Leonard, we love you. While we feel heart-broken with you right now, we cannot really know your despair. Someday God will wipe away your tears. The same hands that stretched the heavens of the universe will touch your cheeks. The same hands that formed the mountains and hills will caress your face. The same hands that curled in agony as the Roman nails cut through, will someday cup your face and brush away your tear. And your tears will be gone. For all time.

Lastly, we don’t mourn without hope. To lose someone you love is a great tragedy. But the greater tragedy is to mourn that loss without hope. As Christians, we have a hope. And our hope has a name – Jesus. We can trust in Jesus. He lived and died for us. He rose again, conquering death and the grave – taking away the sting of death forever.

So when death comes to sting us, we can mourn with faith – for by faith the victory of Jesus over death can be ours. We can mourn with hope – for death is not the end – Jesus has promised resurrection and eternal life. And we can mourn with the assurance that God loves us and longs to be with us forever.