

Leonard Larson's Funeral Remarks

Bishop Cameron Ford, October 28, 2017

I feel privileged to share with you some of my thoughts on this sacred occasion. The death of a loved one is always a tender experience. Often at such times the veil between us and the next world can become quite thin and we can feel the spirits of those that have passed on close by. It can also be a time when we pause and ponder on the meaning of life.

I have found that the truths of the restored gospel can provide profound insight and perspective on the purposes of our brief mortal lives. One of those truths is our eternal nature. We have been around for a very, very long time, long before we were born. I once did an object lesson for my family to try to demonstrate this concept. Because of a hobby of Canyoneering, I happen to own some very long ropes. I once laid out a 230 foot rope on the sidewalk in front of my house and placed a small piece of masking tape at the very center of the rope. I explained to my children that the masking tape represented our mortal life. The length of the rope to the left of the masking tape represented our pre-mortal existence. The rope to the right represented our life after physical death. Of course, no one owns a long enough rope to fully represent the infinite reality behind this doctrine. But it does help put things in perspective. Life is precious and it is short, but it is not the end. Not even close.

Although I often saw him walking in the neighborhood, I never had the privilege of getting to know Brother Larson, partly because he stopped coming to church several years before I moved into the neighborhood. However, Sister Larson has helped me understand a little bit about him and some of the challenges the family has faced. As with many things in life, we often struggle to understand why life unfolds the way it does and we are left to wonder why it has to be so hard. I personally don't have any fully satisfying answers to this question. But with all of my heart I can testify with Nephi that: "I do not know the meaning of all things" but "I know that [our Heavenly Father] loveth his children;"

In the Book of John in the New Testament there is a particularly tender passage of scripture that reveals how much the Lord loves us and suffers with us as we endure trials and unanswered prayers. The account tells of the death of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, and his raising from the dead. All three of these siblings were devoted followers of the Savior. The sisters had urgently requested the presence of the Savior so that He could heal their dying brother. I'm confident that they had both prayed in great faith that He would quickly come and perform a miracle. He did eventually come and perform a miracle; however,

the timing of it was just not the timing they had hoped for and requested. When the Savior finally showed up, the account says:

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.”; John 11:32-35

Then comes one of the shortest and most poignant verses in all scripture;

It says: “Jesus wept.”

Even though He knew that the eventual outcome would be a happy one, he wept anyways. Why? Because He can't help himself. He may be a God of miracles, but He is always first and foremost, a God of love and a God of compassion. Even though He knows the end from the beginning, He rejoices with us in our triumphs, and most of all, He weeps with us in our sorrows.

Always.

But there is an even greater truth taught by this story. When Jesus first came to Martha, He said:

“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” John 11:25-26

We usually just think of physical death when we read this passage; but there are more deaths in life than just the physical one: The death of faith; the death of hope; the death of love; the death of kindness and compassion. These other kinds of deaths are every bit as tragic as physical death; sometimes more so.

I testify that Christ was, and still is, a God of miracles. He not only provides resurrection from physical death for all of mankind, but, to those who “believeth in [him]”, He offers resurrection from all types of death: physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. But these miracles always come according to his perfect timing. And in the meantime, he weeps with us as we go through the painful learning experiences of mortality.

I testify that brother Larson is not gone, but has just graduated to the next phase of his very long existence. I also bear my witness that because of Christ, there are greater miracles ahead both for him and for his family.

And I do so in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.