

Funeral 22 yr old man – Suicide

**All names have been changed to respect privacy of family*

A woman who loses her husband is called a widow...A man who loses his wife is a widower...A child who loses his/her parents is called an orphan... A parent who loses a child... there is no word for...That's how terribly awful such a loss is...It is not supposed to happen that way...We are supposed to leave our children behind,...not the other way around...Debby & Tom – as a parent, I can't begin to imagine the depth of your pain...For you & all Jeff 's family...today is a tough day... One of many tough days you will endure...Like most of us would be doing,...you may be asking "Why did this happen?"...It is totally natural & human to want an answer when death slaps us in the face. ...when it makes no sense to us,...especially the death of one so young & so dear to so many ...Jeff was deeply loved & will forever be loved by the family he so loved & treasured ...I wish I had an answer for you...But I don't. Nobody does. ...There are many things we are not meant to understand...The Bible tells us God's thoughts are not our thoughts;... we can never know the mind of God... If we did, it would mean we were as wise as God,...& none of us is.

And it's totally natural for those of you who were closest to this intelligent, thoughtful, kind, caring young man to be asking yourself if you are somehow at fault..."Did I not love Jeff enough?...Did I not teach him well enough?...Did I fail to see his struggles, his pain?...Should I have reached out & encouraged him more? ...Could I have done better at letting him know how grateful I was to have him in my life?" ...All very natural questions - mostly unfounded. They serve only to deepen your pain & your grief and sink you deeper into the darkness.

When Karen & I met with Jeff 's mom, his grandma Cheryl and his Aunt Lucy to plan his funeral, they insisted that his funeral not dwell on the pain & darkness of Jeff 's death, but instead on the shining light of HOPE from which we who are believers in Jesus Christ can draw comfort & strength. ...They want our time together here in Jeff 's church, & in the reception later in the Great Hall to be a time of celebration & thanks to God for the many wonderful ways Jeff touched our lives in the much too short time he was with us. So they chose Bible readings & hymns & gave instructions to me as the preacher, to help us focus on the light of HOPE that can ease the heartache of having to go on living without your son, grandson, brother, nephew, cousin, friend. With this sure & certain HOPE, the days ahead will be so much easier to face.

I'd like you to picture this. It's nighttime, & we're gathered in some public building with a bunch of other people. Suddenly, all the lights – inside & outside – go out. Total blackout...It's like we're in a deep underground cavern, a place so dark we can't see our hand in front of our face. In that situation, I would probably wonder for a moment why the lights went out, what happened? ... But my real concern should be, "Who's got a flashlight?... Who can lead us out of the darkness?"

When someone dies, especially a young person with every reason to live,...it can plunge us into total darkness...We need more than an answer to "Why"?...We need a guide, a friend, somebody with a flashlight to lead us to the other side of grief...someone who promises us that there is another side to death...an opposite shore...because He's been there & has come back. That someone is Jesus Christ..

We may have come here with feelings of shock, anger, guilt, sadness, ...but as people of faith,...we come with a feeling more powerful than any of these...It is the feeling of Hope that comes from our belief that Jesus Christ, through His suffering & horrible death on the cross, took on the punishment for all the sins of the world... And by His miraculous Resurrection, His rising from death to glorious new life, He showed that death had no hold over Him,...& He

promised that all who believe in Him will share in His resurrection, will be freed from the clutches of death, & will spend eternity with Him in heaven.... It is a HOPE that God has planted in our hearts through the many Bible passages that reveal what He has in store for those who die believing in His Son, Jesus Christ.

One of the most comforting Bible passages is the Gospel we just heard where Jesus is with His disciples on the night before He was going to die...He has just told them how He would be leaving them, & they were troubled & afraid about how they would go on without Him...Jesus eases their fears, telling them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled...Do not be afraid...There are many rooms in my Father's house...& I am going there to prepare a place for you,..& I shall come back & take you to be with Me."

There it is. Jesus telling us that God made heaven with us in mind. ..It's tailor made for us...This life doesn't fit...It was never meant to fit...never meant to be our final destination...Jesus is preparing a place in heaven that is made 2 fit us perfectly...In a Bible reading from 2Cor, St Paul, talking about heaven, says, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, & no human mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."... Heaven is humanly indescribable.

We know that Jeff believed in Jesus Christ...He received the Sacraments of Holy Communion, Penance, & Confirmation. He attended Mass here at COTA on Sunday morning, the day he died...We can only guess what was going on in Jeff 's mind & heart that day – the anguish, the pain, the utter despair he must have been feeling,...Only God knows... our God who loves Jeff more than we can ever imagine,..Our God who - we believe – in His infinite mercy will grant Jeff pardon for his sins & will send His Son Jesus to take Jeff by the hand to that special place He prepared for Him. That place of perfect peace and joy, a place free from troubles, pain and worries...a place tailor made for JeffThis is the HOPE that should fill our hearts today...And with our prayers today & in the days ahead we can hasten Jeff 's journey to that place of perfect peace he so deeply longed for.

Before I end with a prayer, ...I want to say a word to all you young people. The best way you can honor Jeff 's memory,...the best way to make his short life continue to have a meaningful effect on yours, is to do this: ..Whenever you find it hard to see light and love and goodness in your world, & instead see only darkness, or pain, or despair,... please, please do not keep it inside. ...TALK TO SOMEONE...your parents...your family...a trusted friend...a counselor...a minister... Tell them what you are struggling with...ask for advice...ask for help...DON'T TRY TO HANDLE IT ALONE!...And pray...pray...Jesus is always listening... He knows what you are going through..He lived as one of us for 33yrs, dealing w everything we deal with in life, and worse...He knows...Keep a crucifix in your pocket...Hold on to it tightly when you need to feel His love...the love that He poured out for you when He gave His life for you...

Do it for Jeff.. .Do it for those who love you...Do it for yourself.

Let's bow our heads as we pray:

Dear, merciful Lord,

We entrust our dear Jeff to your undying mercy and love.

In this life, Jeff felt much pain,... and he found life extremely hard, so we ask you to enfold him now with your love, where no pain can find him, where your love can heal him.

Lord, make Jeff a Guardian Angel for all those young people who struggle with life, and who struggle to see You and all the love around them.

Give Jeff , dear Lord, kind admittance to Your heavenly Kingdom and bring comfort, strength, and hope to all who loved him and will go on loving him.

We ask this, as we ask all things, thru Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN