

Sermon for The Funeral of James William Stough

Date: March 2, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Job 14:1-17

Epistle Reading: Romans 5:1-11

Gospel Reading: John 10:11-16

Sermon Text: John 10:11-16

Sermon Title: The Good Shepherd

Songs:

Here I Am Lord

How Great Thou Art

On Eagles Wings



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Grace, peace and mercy be your in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and God. Amen.

Jesus said, "I am the good Shepherd." People generally respect Jesus. He was a good teacher, a good prophet, a good man. Though many deny it He was also truly God. He claimed to be God. He accepted worship like God. He did things only God could do. Yet some still deny that Jesus was Emmanuel - "God With Us." They might say, "He was a good teacher, but not God."

I'd like to explore that with you for just a moment. There are those who would say Jesus was not telling the truth when He said He was God. Look at some of the people you see on TV these days. They shout, "...in Jesus name!" and then ask for money. There is a lot of profit in "Jesus" in some places these days. These people are getting rich off of their preaching and antics. So some presume there must have been money in it for Jesus too.

Would a good teacher lie? Jesus was a good teacher, could He also be a liar. A good teacher teaches the truth, teaches to help others, teaches to make their students better people, more understanding people. A good teacher does not teach for great profit. If Jesus was a liar He was not a good teacher. Besides that He was willing to die perhaps the most horrible death mankind has ever invented for His claims. It would appear unlikely that He was lying.

So if not a liar maybe Jesus was just mentally unstable. Maybe He really believed that He was God, even though He was not. A good teacher knows the truth and is able to teach and explain it to his students. He is wise and respected by his students. If Jesus was a good teacher, He could not have been mentally unstable. He could not have been a lunatic making loony claims of deity. His students ate, slept and lived with Him for three years. You cannot live with someone for years and not know them.

You know your family. You know their weaknesses. You know their faults. You know what they've said and done. You know them. Jesus' students knew Jesus. If Jesus had been a lunatic they would have seen through His stories and claims. Yet they also went to their tortured deaths never recanting Jesus' words and teachings. They died proclaiming Jesus to all who could hear.

So if Jesus was a good teacher, could Jesus have been a liar? No. If Jesus was a good teacher, could He have been a lunatic? No. If not a liar, and not a lunatic, than He must be who he claimed to be, Lord. Lord of all that is. He must be Lord because He claimed to be Lord. He must be Lord because He did things that only the Lord can do, and knew things that only the Lord can know.

James Stough believed and confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord and God. I've had a number of opportunities to talk with him myself usually on longer trips to cemeteries. I got to know him. I came to respect him for his strength in faith. He was a good friend. Like you, I miss him, and for good reason.

I've spoken to a number of people about him. They all say, "He was a good man." "He was an honorable man." James Stough was a Christian man and we are all gathered here today to honor that man and give praise to God for the salvation that was freely given to him through Jesus Christ our Lord.

He was a good man. He said his faith was important to him. Did he just say that because it looked good, or because he got something for saying so? Was Jim just lying when he said he was a Christian? Jim didn't get rich claiming to be a Christian. In fact it sometimes caused him more grief than peace. If Jim was lying about his faith why did he struggle with his concerns over others' faith? Why did he care what others thought? Because he believed what he believed.

If he wasn't lying maybe he was just confused. Is it possible that Jim didn't really know what he was talking about? That he was just unstable or misinformed. I've heard some you tell me he was a good man. He displayed wisdom and thoughtfulness, care for others. Quite honestly if you all knew what I know you'd respect him even more. He did things he never wanted people to know about, not because he was ashamed, far from it. He just didn't want to look like he was bragging and He wanted all the credit to be given to God. A man with sound life experience. A man worth talking to. That doesn't sound like a confused man. We do not enjoy being with, nor do we respect, a man who walks around confused and unstable.

So if James was not a liar, and not a lunatic, then what was he? Was he like Jesus, the Lord? Those who knew Jim well would well attest that he was not a perfect man. He made mistakes. He didn't always do the right thing. Jim was, like all of us, sinful and imperfect. That is sadly the human condition being born into a sinful (full of sin) world. Those of you who knew him know that. Some of you lived with him. Others have spent many hours with him. You know he was not perfect. Only God is perfect, and James Stough was not a god.

Nor was he a liar or a lunatic. Not at all. He was however a good Christian man who loved his family. He worried about their faith and their salvation because he loved them and because he knew the truth. Jim knew that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the Good Shepherd. He knew that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the one and only way to Heaven. He knew that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the only One that can protect his family and bring them together again someday.

Jim Stough knew that Jesus, the Holy Christ, the Messiah of God, is the only way, the only truth, the only light, that leads to salvation. Jim was not the Lord, but he knew his Lord, and he wanted his family and friends to know the Lord too. He wanted that because he was a good man, because he was an honorable man, because he was a Christian man who loved his family.

The reason many of you are here today is because you loved and respected this Christian man. You have come here today to show that honor, and love, by paying your last respects for this good man.

If you truly loved him, if you truly respected him, then you should want to be like him in some ways. You should want to have the good things he had, and do the good things he did.

Jim knew that Jesus was not a liar, nor was He a lunatic. He knew that Jesus was the Lord and so should you. As Lord, Jesus said there is only one way to Heaven. That one way is through Him and Him alone. All roads do not lead to Heaven. Being sincere is not good enough. You can be sincerely wrong. The truth comes from God's Word.

We live in a world where truth often has no real meaning; where there is no absolute truth, no universal truth. Everything has become relative to what you want the truth to be. I would tell

you that there is a single, universal, ultimate, truth. A truth that is always true, for all people, in all culture, at all times. That truth comes to us through one book. A book called the Holy Bible.

In that book we read that salvation, true salvation, comes to those who believe. This salvation that Jim, as we sit here, now realizes. James William Stough has looked into the face of God and he was not afraid, he was not ashamed. He was filled with joy because he put his faith wholly, and fully, on the shoulders of Jesus.

What about you? You are here so I know that you loved Jim, you respected him. You loved and respect him because he was no fool. He had some wisdom. You should desire that same wisdom. Where do you find it? You don't. It has found you.

You see real wisdom comes from God and you cannot find God. If God really is the God, King, Emperor of the created Universe and the Author of Life, than He exists outside of our Universe. There is no way for you to get to Him. There is no way for you to travel to the place where He can be found. The only way for you to encounter God is for God to come to you.

We messed this world up and we could not make it right again. We were cut off and separated from God. There is nothing we can do to put it back to the way it was. For that reason, and because God would not endure being separated from His children forever, God came to us and made all things right again. God came to us and saved us.

There is only one way that will allow you to see and greet James Stough again. There is only one way. That way is found in the Bible. It is Jesus' way. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and My sheep know Me."¹ Jim knew his Shepherd. He knew, what we know, that salvation comes through that one Good Shepherd alone.

Jim is home. His trials and struggles are done. Jim's work on this Earth is done. He remained faithful to the end. He has heard those powerful words. The same powerful tender words that all those who believe will hear one day. James Stough has heard the voice of God as He said, "Welcome home good and faithful servant. Enter into glory."

Amen.

1 John 10:14