

A little girl walked into a pet shop. She went up to the shopkeeper and asked with a sweet little lisp, *“Excuse me, mister, do you have any wittle wabbits?”* The shopkeeper bent way down and put his hands on his knees so he would be on her level, and asked, *“Do you want a wittle white wabbit or a wittle bwack wabbit? Or maybe that cute wittle bwown wabbit over there?”* The little girl thought for a moment, put her hands on her knees, leaned forward and said in a quiet little voice, *“Mr., I don’t fink my pyfon weally cares.”*

Well, she’s probably right. Her pet python didn’t care what color the rabbit was she put in his cage.

Our subject this morning is one of life’s universals. Like those rabbits, it makes no difference whether we are black, brown, yellow or white. It makes no difference whether we are rich or poor whether we are people of great acclaim or nobody-- whether we are sinners OR saints. **The mortality rate is still the same... One DEATH per person.**

Yes, Eventually, the grim reaper GETS ALL OF US!!

Fred Craddock tells of going with a friend to visit the family cemetery of James Dickey, author of *Deliverance*. In the small cemetery they discovered two markers with names on them ***George Dickey and Hannah Dickey***. There were also twenty-seven markers without names on them, just fieldstones stuck in the ground at different angles. *Twenty-nine graves in all; two with names, twenty-seven without. The twenty-seven markers without names were for the family’s slaves.* The two marked graves were for the plantation owners. *The owners were buried in the same cemetery as their slaves.*

The Dickey’s graves were marked. Small consolation that may have been. Their bodies still lay in the cold, cruel ground as did the bodies of those who toiled their fields. **DEATH HAS NO RESPECT FOR THOSE WHO DIE.** It is life’s one universal. It makes no difference if you are a Hollywood star or a garbage collector, **the mortality rate is still 100 percent.** *I don’t want to come across as too morbid, today, but it is a fact which we might as well recognize.*

There is a cute story going around about a family that bought a pet hamster. The children promised they would take care of it. You can guess how that worked out. Mom ended up with about 90 percent of the responsibility.

One evening she was thoroughly fed up with her children’s lack of responsibility. She asked, *“How many times do you think that hamster would have died if I hadn’t looked after it?”*

After a moment, her 5-year-old son looked up and asked innocently, *“Uh . . . Once?”* Well, of course he’s right. ***We only die once, but none of us avoid that one-time event.***

Some of the Sadducees came to Jesus with a question regarding the subject of death. One of the differences between Pharisees and Sadducees is that **the Sadducees did not believe in life beyond the grave.** *So, it is obvious they are trying to trap Jesus.*

Listen to their question. **“Teacher, Moses wrote** for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless.

The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. **Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”**

Now ladies, imagine that you were a part of a system like this. If you were married to a man and he died, you would automatically be passed on to his brother, then if he died, the next brother and so on, regardless of what you thought about it or what your sisters-in-law thought about it. Things would likely get a little messy. Theoretically, this was all possible in the culture in which Jesus lived. A woman could survive being married to seven brothers. ***“Now,” the Sadducees wanted to know, “whose wife would she be at the resurrection?”***

Since the Sadducees didn’t believe in a resurrection, this was obviously a trick question. Jesus, of course, saw through it immediately. Yet he decided to indulge them.

Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ***But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like angels.*** They are God’s children, since they are **children of the resurrection.**” In other words,

MARRIAGE IS AN EARTHLY EVENT. It consists, first of all, as a union of the flesh. The same rules do not apply to a spiritual state. There is no marriage in heaven. So, if your first spouse has died and you have remarried, relax. You will be married to neither in the next life. **This is one of the places where Islam and Christianity part ways.** You won't be someone's seventh wife.

Having answered their question, Jesus turns the table and gives a very definite affirmation of life beyond the grave, **just to make sure the Sadducees understand which side he is on:** ***"In the account of the [burning] bush,"*** NOW THIS IS O.T. LANGUAGE, Jesus says, ***"even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'"*** Then Christ says conclusively, ***"[God] is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."***

That's good news, isn't it? Everybody, whether they are alive or whether they are in heaven everybody is alive to God. **There can be no vagueness at this point, LIFE CONTINUES BEYOND THE GRAVE.** ***We need not fear about those who have departed from this life—for now they live with God.***

We live in a death denying culture. When was the last time you heard that **someone has died?** Usually you hear they have ***"passed away" or "passed on."*** The widow says, ***"I lost my husband."*** I don't want to be insensitive, but have you ever been tempted to say, "Oh, do you reckon you will find him one of these days?" **Somehow it seems gentler on our ears to hear that we have lost our loved one; not that they have died.**

Our ancestors looked forward to heaven. We're not as optimistic about what the grave may hold. Some of us are too in love with this world.

John Killinger once told of a woman who was approaching the end of her life. She expressed her feelings like this, ***"I am ready to go, but I am not ready to leave."*** And many of us can relate to that. Life is a wonderful experience. And that is how we ought to feel about it. There is nothing more tragic than the person who is so miserable in life that they look forward to death. **What is truly SAD is the young person who TAKES his or her life. Life can be so good if they will only give LIFE a chance.**

Others of us are willing to let go of our own lives, but not willing to let go of those we love. Perfectly understandable. Jesus did not condemn Mary and Martha for the tears they shed at the death of their brother Lazarus. In fact, Jesus cried, too. ***Of course, it's hard to let go of loved ones. Nothing is more natural than that.***

I read about an interesting new creation called **LifeGem**, l-i-f-e-g-e-m. LifeGems are very special synthetic diamonds. Now most of you know how synthetic diamonds are made. They are made by compressing carbon, the primary element of all diamonds. Also it was found that if you take the CARBON of a person's remains, THEIR "CREMAINS," their Ashes, you can also make a Diamond. In other words, rather than putting the ashes of a loved one in an urn sitting on your mantle or scattering those ashes on the water or from a mountaintop, **LifeGem will compress those ashes into a beautiful diamond you can wear around your neck or on your finger. Prices range from \$2,500 to \$14,000.**

One LifeGem customer, a widow, had the wedding bands that she and her husband had worn melted into a cross and at the center of that cross she had mounted the diamond which she had ordered made from her husband's ashes. That is one way of dealing with the death of a loved one, I suppose, as long as you can afford it. I personally would rather see the money used, say, to endow a memorial in the loved one's name, but you can see how this could be appealing to some people. **IN DEATH...We want to hold on to those we love.**

A healthier way of dealing with death, however, is to recognize it as a TIME OF TRANSITION.
It is a trip that all of us will make one day. In fact, this will be the most exciting trip we will ever take.

Pastor Edward Markquart of Seattle tells about a poem titled, ***"The Midnight of March 31st."*** It's a story about a drunken truck driver. Markquart imagines this driver trucking across Eastern Washington. Finally he comes . . . in his mind . . . to the end of the highway . . . [The highway] seems to stop at the top of a hill that he can't see over . . . it is impossible for him to imagine that the road goes on. And so he pulls off the highway and into a tavern and shouts to everyone: ***"People, the road stops here. The road stops here. It doesn't go any farther. It is Impossible To Go Any Further."***

And everybody in the tavern laughs. They tell him that road goes all across Washington and even across the United States. But the drunken truck driver is convinced the road goes no farther than the hill he can't see over.

Then Markquart adds these wise words, “When people attend a Funeral, and choose to attend the internment/the burial, if there is one, the believe, the road stops here; the road stops here; there is no more; it is impossible for the road to go any farther.”

But, of course, the road does go farther... DEATH IS NOT THE END OF THE ROAD FOR US. There is more beyond. A healthy approach to death is to deal with it as a time of transition.

DEATH IS BUT A JOURNEY FROM THIS WORLD TO THE NEXT!!

One thing we might want to do as we prepare for this journey is to think of those we will leave behind. *The death of a loved one is difficult for even the strongest believer.* Those who are in the later years of life would do well to share their faith with their loved ones in anticipation of the journey that someday they know they will take. Let your loved ones know that you trust God, and even though you do not look forward to dying, **you trust God and you look forward to being in GOD’S PRESENCE.** Your attitude toward dying can influence how well they are able to deal with this **TRAMA CALLED DEATH.**

Author King Duncan tells about a young man he met in the small town of Maryville, TN. **Duncan had just finished speaking to a group on the HEALING POWER OF HUMOR.** It was then that a young man came up to talk about the death of his brother.

There were three brothers in their family. The family was quite involved in this small community and so, as youngsters, these three brothers were forced to accompany their parents to the funeral home for the receiving of friends whenever someone in the community died. As the boys grew into their teen years, they began to develop biases about funerals. For example, **there was one floral display that all three of them detested.** Anyone who has ever gone to a funeral home in the rural south may have seen this arrangement. **It is a wreath with a telephone in the middle of it and a ribbon fastened across it on which is printed the words, “Jesus Called.”**

To make a long story short, one of these three brothers died as a young adult after a prolonged illness. The family was devastated. He was a fine young man. *But now it was this family’s turn to receive friends at the local funeral home.*

You may have guessed it. *One of the floral arrangements that had been sent up in the chapel for the receiving of friends was the one with the telephone and the ribbon with the words, “Jesus called.”*

The two surviving brothers were enraged. Who could have sent this arrangement that they so despised to their beloved brother’s funeral? They quickly made their way to the arrangement to read the accompanying card. ***And on the card was the signature . . . of their deceased brother. He had sent the arrangement to his own funeral as one last joke on his brothers. In a flash, said one surviving brother, their tears turned to laughter.***

What a gift this dying young man had given to his brothers. He had looked ahead to his journey of transition, and he had sought to make things easier for those he loved. Sometimes people come to the end of their lives and they are angry. They want to punish the world for their own lack of faith. And they make things more difficult for those they leave behind.

Isn’t it time for US to accept the FACT we only have (1) ONE DEATH? And in that FACT of our LIFE, we need to ASK...Do We trust God? Do you believe that God will never forget or forsake US? Do we believe that the road we travel does not end at the cemetery?

If we have FAITH...The road does not stop AT THE CEMETERY, BECAUSE...**God is the God of the LIVING!**
Everyone who has ever lived is still alive in God.

SO, won’t you settle THAT in your own mind and then share your faith with others--so that they too might believe THEIR ROAD CONTINUES ON TO GOD TOO?

AMEN.