

Psalm 103:1-5 + ...And Forget Not All His Benefits
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + Christian Victory Service of Talbert Norris
25 April 2018

In the name of our living Savior Jesus, Amen.

Dear Family and Friends of Tal Norris, especially you dear Bob, Nancy, and Andy,

When I first met Tal back in 2011, he and Aria had just moved back to the area. They were settling into their home in Bayberry and wanted to make sure everything was in order. They wanted to make sure that everything was just right, that no details were missed. One of those details was reconnecting with old friends and their former congregation here at Cross of Christ.

So we sat and visited for a while. Tal and Aria shared their story with me, how the Lord had guided their lives over the years. Tal emphasized to me how much they wanted everything to be set, even telling me on that first visit how they had even pre-planned for their funerals. He wanted to make sure that nothing was forgotten. Years of grace have passed since that first visit, years filled with joys and sorrows, years filled with the challenges that come with health issues and aging, but no matter what seemed to be lost along the way, there was one thing that was never lost, never forgotten. Maybe you've picked up on it in the hymns and lessons for this service that Tal picked years ago. No matter what was going on in his life, Tal trusted in his Savior Jesus. No matter what difficulty he faced, Tal did not forget what Jesus had done for him.

The reading from God's Word that Tal picked for this sermon is not your typical funeral text. It's not somber or solemn or serious. No, it's filled with joy and praise and thanksgiving. This psalm of praise almost seems to fit better on Thanksgiving Day than at a funeral. Yet this text from the Psalms—the hymnal of God's Old Testament people—was selected by someone who didn't just love to sing. He loved to sing the praises of his Savior God, the praises of the Lord of free and faithful grace who rescues his people from sin and death, the praises of the Lord who gave Tal Norris eternal life last week. So today we too praise the Lord **AND FORGET NOT ALL HIS BENEFITS.**

What was it that made Tal Norris's heart sing? Surely he loved his native Latvia, the land of his birth. Surely he loved his adopted homeland for which he served honorably. Surely he loved deeply his bride Aria and all of you, his family and his friends, but deep down in his soul, what made him sing? What filled him to overflowing with praise? Perhaps old King David can help us understand since he himself was moved by the same love of the Lord. ***“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits...”***

Why would David want to praise the Lord with every fiber of his being—his heart, his soul, his mind, his body? Why urge his soul to ***“forget not all his benefits”***? Look to the One he is praising and understand. Look to the Lord of free and faithful grace—the Lord overflowing with undeserved love for sinful souls like yours and mine, the Lord who comes to our rescue.

What has the Lord done that moves us to rejoice even in the midst of tears? He ***“forgives all your sins...”*** You see, every one of us desperately needs that forgiveness of our guilt. From our parents and every generation before them, each of us has inherited a sinful nature that makes us blind and hateful to God's holy will, that makes us ultimately dead in sin. Because of that inborn sin, the holy God has every right to ***“treat us as our sins deserve”*** and ***“repay us according to our iniquities”*** with his holy judgment. (Psalm 103:10)

Yet the Lord ***“forgives all your sins”*** through the Savior he sent 1,000 years after David. That Savior came in lowliness to perfectly meet God's holy standards for you. Jesus came to take on himself God's holy accusations against you, to endure God's holy anger in your place on the cross, and to suffer the death you and I deserve for every one of our sins. To make that forgiveness complete, Jesus conquered death on Easter morning.

Tal understood all that. He knew his faults and sins. He knew what sin had done to his life and the lives of those around him. He knew that he deserved God's eternal condemnation for his sins. Yet by faith in Christ, Tal knew that Jesus had suffered that punishment for him in his place. Tal knew that Jesus had risen from the dead to give him life. It wasn't because Tal was such a great father or grandfather or husband or brother or accountant or friend or because of anything he had done for his family or country. No, the Lord saved Tal purely out of undeserved love for sinners like him, like us, through Jesus.

By faith in Christ, Tal knew that Jesus had taken all his sins away. He knew he was forgiven through Jesus and assured of that forgiveness by Christ's resurrection from the dead. Tal knew that because Jesus' tomb was

empty, his grave would be empty someday too. He knew that Jesus would bring him to heaven someday, and that made his heart sing!

Yet the Lord doesn't just forgive! He has other benefits! Even though we are forgiven and saved by Christ, that doesn't mean a Christian's life is easy. We still face troubles and challenges. Sometimes those difficulties come because our sinful nature gets its way and leads us to think or say or do something that leads to painful consequences. Sometimes those difficulties come because we're Christians and the world around us and the sinful natures inside of us are opposed to our Lord and his Word. Sometimes those difficulties come because we live in a sinful world where hardship and tragedy, pain and sorrow, disease and disaster and death exist. Especially if the difficulties pile up, we might be tempted to forget the Lord and his benefits.

So how does a Christian respond? He sings, ***"Praise the LORD...who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion..."*** When sins we have committed affect our lives and the lives of others, the only solution is God's forgiveness in Christ. When we face hardship for following Christ, we find strength in our Savior Jesus. When we face the effects of sin in our daily lives, we trust in the Lord's gracious mercy and healing whether in this life or in the eternal rest of heaven. Christ rescues us from the despair and fear of death by giving us the hope and confidence that because he lives, we too shall live.

That trust in the Lord of grace, the Lord who is compassionate in his love, guided and helped Tal throughout his life. From immigrating from Latvia to serving as an American soldier during the Korean War to settling in this area and raising a family with his beloved bride Aria to joining this congregation in its infancy to moving across the country and back to facing all of the challenges of aging, including the loss of his eyesight and hearing, Tal trusted that his Lord would bless him, his family, and God's people with his love. Why?

In his Word, God has promised to heal and redeem and crown his people with his compassionate love. As an infant, Tal's parents brought him to be baptized bringing him into God's family through water and the Word. Through the Word, Tal came to understand not only what God had promised, but what God had accomplished. Tal knew that the Lord had healed his sin-sick soul. The Lord had rescued him from an eternity in hell. The Lord was going to give him eternal rest. Remembering all that the Lord had done for him made Tal's heart sing!

Now in the last couple years, as health issues got worse for both Tal and Aria and daily life on their own got more difficult, you would expect Tal's song of praise to the Lord to become more muted and less joyful. Yet the Lord of grace gave Tal one more reason to praise his Lord. ***"Praise the LORD...who satisfies you with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."*** In this life, Tal didn't expect the Lord to restore his eyesight or his hearing or allow him to do what he used to be able to do, but Tal knew what the Lord would do. The Lord would someday enable him to see his living Savior clearly in the glories of heaven. The Lord would someday allow him to hear clearly the glorious hymns of praise to the Lamb of God and join his voice with the hosts of heaven. The Lord would someday wipe away all his tears and remove all the effects of sin from this life.

...And that's exactly what the Lord did. On April 19, Tal's faith became sight and he joined his voice with all the hosts of heaven praising our living Savior for all eternity. On that day, Jesus made all things new for Talbert Norris. For us who remain, the Lord dries our tears by forgiving our sins, healing our diseases of body and soul, redeeming us from death, and satisfying us with his daily gifts of grace. As we long for heaven, we praise the Lord with every fiber of our beings and never forget his benefits because Christ has lived. Christ has died. Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. Amen.