

This is Us
“The Thing No One Wants to Talk About”
May 27, 2018

Who is Like Our God
Death was Arrested

Rick Intro Video

Feature-Impossible Year

There's no sunshine this impossible year, only
black days and sky grey and clouds full of fear.

And storms full of sorrow that won't disappear
Just typhoons and monsoons this impossible
year.

Those lyrics remind me so much of what I've
heard people say right after that thing
happens, that thing no one wants to talk about.

When I first came on staff at North Heartland it was pretty evident I did NOT like to talk about this thing. NOT AT ALL.

The very mention of the thing would send me running. If someone brought IT up, I would leave the room, change the subject, or stick my fingers in my ears saying lalalalala.

Seriously, I was a grown woman but I could not stand IT to be brought up. Truly, I feared it.

This thing...sometimes you see it coming, you know it's just around the corner but sometimes it comes out of nowhere.

So what is it exactly? What is the thing?

I found this clip that illustrates it. The clip comes from the very popular TV series that shares the same name as our current series,

This is Us. And before I have them show it I want to mention that if you are watching and are not caught up you might want to close your eyes and block your ears for the next 3 minutes as the scene contains spoilers.

Let's watch.

VIDEO-This is Us-Death of Jack Pearson

So what is the thing? Death.

Oh sure some people might like to talk about it but most do not. Some might even avoid it at all costs like I did. But in the 19 years I've been on staff here at North Heartland that has changed in me. Little did I know that when you go to work for a church, death is hard to avoid.

I was very lucky that during my first couple years on staff, I was being mentored by our Associate Pastor, Kitti Homan and she saw this very real fear of death and dying that had

a strong hold on me. She began helping me to face and fight my fear. Helping me to discover the lies that were holding me captive in fear.

As time would pass, Kitti taught me how to sit in those intimate spaces between death and life. How to just be silent with a family that was facing the death of their loved one. How to allow the pain to seek in and to not try and fix it but rather just to point people back to Jesus.

And I did, I started off awkward but with each experience, with each journey, I became more comfortable with the reality that we are all going to die and we are all going to lose the people we love. So glad you came to church today eh? I'm a regular bottle of sunshine.

So as a result of working up close with countless funerals, my life has been changed. My relationships have deepened and I've learned to be more honest and vulnerable. I've

learned so many valuable lessons.

You see when you get an upfront seat at one of the most intimate and deeply personal times in a person's life, you are granted the ability to learn (if you want).

So to every person who has allowed me to be at your loved one's bedside as they took their last breath....thank you. There is nothing more sacred than those last moments as you watch this person who is so deeply loved say goodbye to our world. And to me those moments make it so clear that we are more than just these bodies and that death is not the end of us or those we love. Having experienced those final moments several times, you will never convince me that we just cease to exist. It is a sacred moment watching someone leave this place.

To every person who has poured out their

heart and allowed me to serve at your loved ones funeral...thank you. Your hearts for the one you loved have touched mine and made my relationships so much more than they ever would have been had I not learned from you to seize the day and relish every moment. Because no matter when it comes, I'll always wish for just one more day with the ones I love.

To every person who has allowed me in on their grief journey...thank you. Your willingness to share the good, the bad and the ugly with me have provided me with a deeper understanding that though we may all grieve differently, the pain is real and we will have to face it. You can't go around it, you have to go through it and if you try to avoid it, it will wreak havoc in your life.

From those who have left us, I have learned so much as well. I wish I had time to honor every single person from NHCC who we have

had to say good bye to but sadly I do not. Trust that with each person's life there is something about them woven into my life. With that said, there are three I want to share about.

The first is Tracy Stephens. I met Tracy when I first came on staff at North Heartland. She was 18 and had spent the majority of her life in hospitals as she had Cystic Fibrosis. When she was well and healthy enough, Tracy would volunteer for me in our office. She taught me so much but one of the key lessons I'll never forget is that Tracy taught me there is always someone who has it worse than you. We were talking about her extended family at Children's Mercy and how she spent so much time in there. I asked how she kept herself so positive (because she was super funny, snarky and generally a happy person most of the time) in spite of the difficulties. She said if she started feeling sorry for herself she would think about or visit the kids in the cancer ward. Kids much

younger than her who were going through extremely difficult treatments. She said Shannon, if you look you around you will see there is always someone who has it harder than you. She said she had two amazing parents who loved her deeply, great friends and family and great care. Though Tracy received a double lung transplant in 2001 her body could never adjust and she passed away the summer of 2002 at age 21. Tracy taught me to learn to laugh, to live life fully and to never feel too sorry for yourself.

Next up is Paul Mann. Paul was around 61 when he first started attending North Heartland. We only had him with us for 8 very short years before he passed away of lung cancer. Paul taught me that you're never too old or too far gone to be transformed and used by God.

When he first started attending, I still

remember him coming to my office to ask about volunteering in some way because he was retired and had time on his hands and felt he should be doing something. He went on to mention that he was shocked that church hadn't crumbled when he came in the doors as he had done a lot in his life he was not proud of and there were things I couldn't even imagine. I remember telling Paul, Jesus came to die for all of us and all of our sins, so nice try but you can't be the only one whose sins are so bad he just couldn't do it. I know you want to be special but you're not in that regard.

Paul accepted Christ and was baptized and went on to create a tremendous impact here at North Heartland to those he greeted, counseled in Good Sense, served alongside in events with and did life with in his small group. He was a Mann of God and truly reminded me that you are never too old or too far gone to allow God to transform you, if you are willing

to swallow your pride and surrender your life to the Lord He will do amazing things.

And last but certainly not least was Michael Paden. Michael was only 42 when he passed from a rare aggressive cancer. Michael had served faithfully for years as one of our key musicians and singers. Truly this guy had amazing talent and sounded just like Stephen Curtis Chapman. Though he was up front and on the stage every week, Michael was not one for being the center of attention.

Michael taught me that you don't have to be a big personality to have a big impact for the Lord. Michael was a quiet guy with a boring day job who simply put his gifts, talents and time on the table to be used by God and his influence reached far and wide. People were reconciled to God and others because of him. His funeral packed out Vineyard as people from several different churches and various

walks of life, showed up on the Monday of Thanksgiving week to honor him and what his influence, friendship and ministry had meant in their lives. I truly believe that Michael had no idea the depth and breadth of the influence his life had had on others. You don't have to be a pastor to impact lives for Jesus and you don't have to be a big personality to have big influence. Surrender your gifts and time to the Lord and He will allow you to have an amazing part in His Kingdom's work.

The way each of these folks lived and faced dying, reminded me of this verse found in Genesis chapter 50:

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Genesis 50:20 (NIV)

The enemy intends to use death to harm us,

to sow seeds of doubt, to break us down, to cause us to distrust God, to cause us to pull away, to isolate, to self protect, to numb... but God can use it to save others, to wake people up spiritually.

See nothing quite like death cuts to the chase and causes us to consider what we believe. Earlier on, I heard Rick say in one of his funeral messages that with death you only have two choices, you can't sit on the fence. You either trust God, that He is good and for you and that this world is just a temporary home until Jesus hits the reset button and returns everything back to the way it was supposed to be-all of us living in perfect harmony and peace with the Lord and with one another and if you take that path you get better.

OR you distrust God, that He is not good or maybe not even real because after all who

wants to believe in a God who allows such pain in the world and you get bitter.

And I'd love to tell you that every time I have to face the reality of death that I take the better path, that seeds of doubt don't creep in, that I willingly accept that this is not our home and that death is just part of our live here together but that would be a lie.

In fact, just as recently as Easter I found myself wrestling once again with the enemy. As many of you know, my good friend and fellow life of the party event planner, Amy Harris, was diagnosed just before Easter with a rare and aggressive cancer of the stomach lining. It was the dreaded answer to the pain she had been suffering for not quite a year and to say I was upset is a gross understatement. Amy and her family have been at NHCC since the beginning, I've known her since before I came on staff. She and I share birthday

lunches and far too much laughter. She is the brains behind the fun at our women's and couple's events.

In the days surrounding her diagnosis and learning that the cancer was inoperable, I was wrought with anger and sadness. I found myself angry that she and her family would have to go through this journey, I found myself overwhelmed at what the worst case scenario would mean in my life.

I remember sitting in a service during the worship set and being overwhelmed with emotion and thinking, Lord I can't do this. I can't face this. It's too hard. And then the Lord said, no matter what this storm brings, I'll be with you. And he reminded me of the scripture where Jesus and his disciples are in a boat and a terrible storm wells up and the disciples are certain they will die and Jesus is there asleep in the boat. He is with them and he

wakes to calm the storm.

That day and in the days to come the Lord kept reminding me of people who I had walked through grief and loss with, people who had endured the storm and were now on the other side. Sure they still had their days but overall they were rebuilding their lives with Jesus one day, one step at a time.

As I was considering this, I got a call from one of the them. A friend who had endured great loss and whose journey is an encouragement to me. She is both a friend and a leader with me and after we talked for a while about the pain, the heartache, and the journey ahead, I told her that I was pretty sure that the Lord was leading me to speak about this on Memorial Day and she said, you know what, I'll help you if you want.

So we sat down and she let me interview her

about her journey through loss. So let me introduce you to my dear friend and fellow North Heartlander Karen Brown.

VIDEO-Karen Brown

Revelation chapter 21 verses 1-5 says:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write

this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Rev. 21:1-5

But until that day when there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain, we must endure.

As I was preparing for this message, I was reminded of a story I heard on NPR one night. It was the story of two parents who developed a video game called That Dragon Cancer that journeyed through their son’s battle with terminal cancer. Their son, Joel, was just five when he succumbed to the illness. I remembered being so moved by their story as they were Christians and they spoke about that place where you pray and hope for a miracle but trust the goodness of God when it doesn’t come. That we were not meant for this world.

I decided to go looking up info on them and found their blog. The mom was writing about

people with enduring faith that had been a tremendous encouragement to her, people who had prayed for the miracle and didn't get it, people who lost their family members suddenly and too soon, and how these people continued to worship and lean into the Lord despite the pain and how that enduring faith, the one that withstands the storm is truly the kind of faith we should seek.

For me, I'm lucky to have several of these folks in my life. People who have endured severe storms, some might even say hurricanes, and yet they get back up, they push through, they place their trust in the Lord and they rebuild. I look at them and they remind me that when the storm comes and it will most certainly come, I can withstand it. I can come through it.

I'm reminded of the verses found in Matthew chapter 7:

"Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash." Matthew 7:24-27 NLT

So let me ask you, what is your life built on?
Where does your hope come from?

The storm is coming. Don't wait. Decide today
where your hope comes from.

As for me, my hope comes In Christ Alone.

Let's pray

Prayer

For those whose foundation is secure and made stronger by the storms they have endured, help us to remain.

For those whose foundations need repair because the storm has come and caused cracks and allowed lies and distrust to creep in from the enemy, heal us.

For the broken hearted, be near.

For the fearful, help us to overcome.

For those who feel anger and bitterness, heal us

For those who feel depression and anxiety, heal us.

For those who aren't sure, help them to seek you, to know you, before the storm comes.

Amen

I invite you to stand and sing this song as a prayer and a statement of faith. For those of you who want to build your life on Christ, be reminded of what that means. Let's sing.

Feature-In Christ Alone

Closing comments-Shannon

Prayer down front

Offering at Door

Lots going on this week-check your program