

Walking with the Reaper
Matthew 27:32
Pastor Peter Hiatt
March 5, 2006

[The worship band plays...]

“Don’t Fear the Reaper”
By Blue Oyster Cult

All our times have come
Here but now they're gone
Seasons don't fear the reaper
Nor do the wind, the sun or the rain..
We can be like they are

Come on baby...don't fear the reaper
Baby take my hand...don't fear the reaper
We'll be able to fly...don't fear the reaper
Baby I'm your man...

Valentine is done
Here but now they're gone
Romeo and Juliet
Are together in eternity...Romeo and Juliet

40,000 men and women everyday...
Like Romeo and Juliet
40,000 men and women everyday...
Redefine happiness
Another 40,000 coming everyday...
We can be like they are

Come on baby...don't fear the reaper
Baby take my hand...don't fear the reaper
We'll be able to fly...don't fear the reaper
Baby I'm your man...

Love of two is one
 Here but now they're gone
 Came the last night of sadness
 And it was clear she couldn't go on

Then the door was open and the wind appeared
 The candles blew then disappeared
 The curtains flew then he appeared...
 saying don't be afraid

Come on baby...and she had no fear
 And she ran to him...then they started to fly
 They looked backward and said goodbye...
 she had become like they are
 She had taken his hand...
 she had become like they are

Come on baby...don't fear the reaper
 Come on baby...don't fear the reaper
 Come on baby...don't fear the reaper

[A film clip is shown from Monty Python's The Meaning of Life]

[Suddenly we see the Grim Reaper. He is hooded, in a black cloak with a sackcloth jock-strap, and bearing... a scythe. He materializes outside a lowly cottage and strikes the door with his scythe. Geoffrey, who is Marketing Director of Uro-Pacific Ltd, opens the door. From inside the house comes the sound of a dinner party.]

Geoffrey: Yes?
 [Pause. The Reaper breathes death-rattlingly.]
 Is it about the hedge?
 [More breathing.]
 Look, I'm awfully sorry but...

Grim Reaper: I am the Grim Reaper. I am Death.

Geoffrey: Yes well, the thing is, we've got some people from America for dinner tonight...

[Geoffrey's wife, Angela is coming to see who is at the door. She calls.]

Angela: Who is it, darling?

Geoffrey: It's a Mr. Death or something... he's come about the reaping...

[To Reaper.] I don't think we need any at the moment.

Angela: [appearing] Hallo. Well don't leave him hanging around outside darling, ask him in.

Geoffrey: Darling, I don't think it's quite the moment...

Angela: Do come in, come along in, come and have a drink, do. Come on...

[She returns to her guests.]

It's one of the little men from the village... Do come in, please. This is Howard Katzenberg from Philadelphia...

Katzenberg: Hi.

Angela: And his wife, Debbie.

Debbie: Hallo there.

Angela: And these are the Portland-Smythes, Jeremy and Fiona.

Fiona: Good evening.

Angela: This is Mr. Death.

[There is a slightly awkward pause.]

We'll do get Mr. Death a drink, darling.

[The Grim Reaper looks a little startled.]

Angela: Mr. Death is a reaper.

Grim Reaper: The Grim Reaper.

Angela: Hardly surprising in this weather, ha ha ha...

Katzenberg: So you still reap around here do you, Mr. Death?

Grim Reaper: I am the Grim Reaper.

Geoffrey: [sotto voce] That's about all he says... [Loudly] There's your drink, Mr. Death.

Angela: Do sit down.

Debbie: We were just talking about some of the awful problems facing the -

[The Grim Reaper knocks the glass off the table. Startled silence.]

Angela: Would you prefer white? I'm afraid we don't have any beer.

Jeremy: The Stilton's awfully good.

Grim Reaper: I am not of this world.

[He walks into the middle of the table. There is a sharp intake of breath all round.]

Geoffrey: Good Lord!

[They are beginning to understand.]

Grim Reaper: I am Death.

Debbie: [nervously] Well, isn't that extraordinary? We were just talking about death only five minutes ago.

Angela: [even more nervously] Yes we were. You know, whether death is really... the end...

Debbie: As my husband, Howard here, feels... or whether there is... and one so hates to use words like 'soul' or 'spirit'...

Jeremy: But what other words can one use...

Geoffrey: Exactly...

Grim Reaper: You do not understand.

Debbie: Ah no... obviously not...

Katzenberg: Let me tell you something, Mr. Death...

Grim Reaper: You do not understand!

Katzenberg: Just one moment. I would like to express on behalf of everyone here, what a really unique experience this is...

Jeremy: Hear, hear.

Angela: Yes, we're so delighted that you dropped in, Mr. Death...

Katzenberg: Can I finish please...

Debbie: Mr. Death... is there an after-life?

Katzenberg: Dear, if you could just wait please a moment...

Angela: Are you sure you wouldn't like some sherry?

Katzenberg: Angela, I'd like just to say at this time...

Grim Reaper: Be quiet!

Katzenberg: Can I just say this at this time, please...

Grim Reaper: Silence!!! I have come for you.

[Pause as this sinks in. Sidelong glance. A stifled fart.]

Angela: ... You mean to...

Grim Reaper: ... Take you away. That is my purpose. I am Death.

Geoffrey: Well that's cast rather a gloom over the evening hasn't it?

Katzenberg: I don't see it that way, Geoff. Let me tell you what I think we're dealing with here, a potentially positive learning experience...

Grim Reaper: Shut up! Shut up you American. You always talk, you Americans, you talk and you talk and say "Let me tell you something" and "I just wanna say this", Well you're dead now, so shut up.

Katzenberg: Dead?

Grim Reaper: Dead.

Angela: All of us??

Grim Reaper: All of you.

Geoffrey: Now look here. You barge in here, quite uninvited, break glasses and then announce quite casually that we're all dead. Well, I would remind you that you are a guest in this house and...

[The Grim Reaper pokes him in the eye.]

Grim Reaper: Be quiet! You Englishmen... You're all so pompous.

Next, the Englishman tries to murder the Reaper. So fear of death leads to denial of death, which leads to more death, which is murder, which is sin. The denial of death.

Let's pray.

Lord God, we pray that You would help us to preach Your life and so in Jesus' name I rebuke any dark spirit of death or spirit of suicide, spirit of fear, and I claim the blood of Your covenant over this, Your sanctuary, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Sigmund Freud argued that civilization is built on denial. First, the repression of sexual desire for if it weren't repressed, we'd devour each other. And secondly, the

repression of mortality. That is, denial of death for if we really saw it, we'd go stark raving mad fearing the reaper.

Sex and death. Oftentimes, they're like, the same thing. Plants will often go to seed and then die. They spend their energy on reproduction, then expire. That's why you're supposed to mow your lawn every week, so it can't go to seed (the very best lawns are sexually frustrated lawns). For lots of plants and animals, to reproduce is to die.

Listen to Jesus,

The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified [the glorious appearing]. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Jesus is the seed that will die, and bear much, much fruit.

Sex and death: great sex (holy sex), and great death are a lot alike. They are both the surrender of sovereignty. They are both the loss of control... a person, a heart, naked, vulnerable, and exposed in the right place at the right time to the right person.

It seems there's very little great sex or great death in our society. We live in a pornographic society.

We have a pornography of sex. We're saturated with the form of sexuality but starving for its substance: Communion in a covenant.

We have a pornography of death. Folks love to go to movies and watch people die. Yet they're terrified of dying themselves. We're saturated with the form of death, but we are terrified of its substance, terrified to speak of its substance and delve into its meaning.

The pornography of death... I wonder if we do that in church? Watch Jesus die, and then go have brunch (I've got nothing against brunch.) I mean, we watch Jesus die and think, "How nice. Now I don't have to die."

Yet, He says, "See my body broken? Eat it. See my blood shed? Drink it. Commune with me, my Bride, and bear the fruit that is life."

Well, Freudians would argue these desires and fears must be repressed so civilization can function, and yet when they're repressed they manifest in neurosis and psychosis. That is, all sorts of sin.

It's like there is an emptiness in us, and if we, ourselves, try to fill it, civilization will be destroyed. Yet, if we thoroughly repress it (hide the emptiness), the emptiness is so great and powerful that eventually we'll go insane.

So, we deny death, and we're all going insane.

The denial of death... some say it motivates all that we do. We have a multi-million dollar funeral industry that runs on denying death... dressing up corpses and selling beautiful caskets that look like beds that give the illusion that the deceased is asleep.

When my dad died, and they came to pick up his body, rigor mortis had set in. Dad's head had been propped up on some pillows. So when they transferred his body to the gurney, his head was just stuck there up in the air. The

young guy working the gurney appeared really nervous, looked around, and tucked a pillow comfortably under Dad's head. At that my sister, Lydia, lost it. She just... started laughing. She exclaimed, "He doesn't need a pillow. He's dead. He's dead."

Well, I'd spent a good deal of time with the body, and it was dead. Death is ugly and painful. Scripture calls death "the last enemy." So of course, we fear the reaper and try to deny the reality of death.

Sociologists point out that many societies repress their fear of death through trivia and bickering. You go to the funeral, the pastor reads some goofy poetry, then you talk about baseball and the ingredients of the potato salad.

That's where that Monty Python clip is so brilliant. The reaper is standing in their midst, and death is what's for dinner. And they turn death into trivia 'til the reaper says,

Shut up! Shut up! You Americans, you
always talk, you Americans. You talk and
you talk, and say, "Let me tell you
something," and "I just wanna say this..."
Well, you're dead now, so shut up!

Then the Englishman protests, and the reaper says, "Be quiet! You Englishmen... you're all so bleepin' pompous."

Pomposity is a way we deny death. Most religion is dreadfully pompous. That is, we make trivial things ultimate so that we can make ultimate things trivial.

We say, "Pastor, tell me
what I need to do,
and what I need to know,

and how long I need to pray,
 and how much I have to give,
 and which potty words I can say,
 and which potty words I can't say.

Tell me that these things are of ultimate concern so I don't have to face the existential reality of my own impending death."

Well, most religion (maybe all) runs on fearing the reaper and the denial of death. Our economy sure does.

What are they selling you in all those commercials? Sex or the denial of death. And if you're middle-aged, you know they're often the same thing.

"Why do men sleep around?" asks Cher to her mother in the movie Moonstruck. Answer, "They're afraid to die."

Afraid 'cause their hair is falling out, their job is no longer fulfilling, the wife of their youth no longer looks the same in her bikini, the Viagra barely works, and deep in their gut they know, "I'm dying!" And they're trying to deny it.

It runs our economy, our society. It runs our country, our politics.

People complain that George Bush is pushing the politics of fear... *all* politics is the politics of fear—health care, legislation, taxation, war. Civil government enforces its agenda through fear of death. It is the power of the sword.

So if a person loses his fear of the reaper and that sword, civil government loses its grip on that person.

Jesus said to Pilate, "You have no power over me except that which is granted from above." Freaked Pilate out. Freaks us out. Guys like Jesus are dangerous to this world 'cause they don't have a proper fear of the reaper.

I think that's why we killed Jesus. We killed Jesus 'cause we feared the reaper, and He did not.

Well, religion, economy, politics... this world runs on fearing the reaper and denying death, which only leads to more fear and death.

We've got this "War on Terror." But what do we fight with? More terror. Guns, bombs, Guantanamo Bay, Abhu Gharib... we manage terror with terror.¹ That's how civil government works. They fight the fear of death with the fear of death.

¹ I do believe that God has ordained civil government to "bear the sword" (Romans 13:4). So I am not saying that there is a moral equivalence between a terrorist and a soldier.

However, when civil government responds to terrorist activity with military intervention, they seek to manage that terrorist activity through fear, fear of reprisal, and that is the "power of the sword." The is "for your good" (Romans 13:4).

"The sword" is not the calling on the individual disciple, however. Jesus just told Pete, "All who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 27:52). For two thousand years the church has debated if and when a Christian can serve in the military. In our theological tradition, believers have said, "yes" a Christian can, as long as the "war" meets certain criteria, just war criteria, and the soldier fights as one holding an "office" for a legitimate civil government and not as an individual seeking vengeance.

We discussed these issues in more detail in previous sermons in Matthew (4-3-05 and 12-9-05).

It's a sad reality in this world that often times when we respond to aggression with military action inspired by a fear of death, we end up producing more fear of death and more death. I am unprepared to debate which "wars" are "just" and which ones are "not." However, I must point out that guns and tanks cannot liberate us from a "fear of death," and much of the time only increase it's strength and deadly effect.

I suppose it has its place in this world, and yet we're no longer citizens of this world, are we?

But we'll say:

- “Well, we have to do something. Don't you get it? If terrorist cells infiltrate our country, you could die. Your kids could die. We all could die!”
- We say: “Well, I can't give more to famine relief. I've got to put more in the bank and build bigger barns 'cause I might not have enough, and if I run out I could die. My kids could die. We could die!”
- “Of course I need a new wife. I'm not getting any younger, and I could die!”
- “Forgive her? I'd die. I'd just have to die!”
- “No, I can't say that. I can't confess that. If I did, I'd die. I'd die. I'd just die!”

It's like the ace in the hole at the end of every argument with God, “But I could die. I'd just die!”

Well, maybe sometimes we're supposed to just die. Yes, I hear your argument, but maybe you're supposed to just die. It's time to die. At that thought a million arguments lose their power, and this world loses its grip on our souls.

Hebrews 2 tells us that through the fear of death the devil keeps us in lifelong bondage. So if your reasoning is based on the fear of death, perhaps your reasoning isn't God's reason, who is Jesus.

Numerous times praying with folks struggling with demons, a demon will manifest or speak to the person's

mind saying, “If you get rid of me, if you confess this to Jesus, you'll die!”

Well, if you confess to Jesus, maybe you will die, but maybe dying with Jesus is the greatest gift a child of Adam could ever receive. Sometimes you're just supposed to die.

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him. As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.

Jesus, the Messiah, is crucified naked, vulnerable, and exposed in shame outside the gates of His beloved Jerusalem, His future Bride, as prophesied. It was all according to plan. Sometimes you're supposed to just die.

And you say, “Yeah, when you're 95 in the nursing home and well medicated.”

Well, look at Jesus... 33, in His prime, and sinless.

And you say, “He carried that cross so I wouldn't have to.”

Let's read verse 32 once again.

As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.

Who is this Simon guy, and what's he doing carrying Jesus' cross? Simon means "hearing" or "heard." Cyrene was a city in North Africa (present day Libya). Simon could have been an ethnic Greek, Roman, Arab, or Jew. If he's the Simon called "Niger" in Acts 13:1, he was probably black. He was probably a stranger to Jerusalem, the kind they'd bury in the Potter's Field.

He was like an "everyman." What Jesus might call a lost sheep of the house of Israel (like the Syro-Phoenician woman).

He was probably a seeker from the nations. Perhaps he'd heard of the God of Israel, like Isaiah had prophesied: He'd come to Jerusalem to seek Him and to worship Him. Perhaps he was a seeker who had come from the nations, who had come for Passover when the lambs were slain, and the Exodus was commemorated. Perhaps he'd stay 'til Pentecost, the harvest of first fruits, the harvest feast when the reapers began to reap the grain.

You see, God commanded the Jews to celebrate life in seasons, "For everything there is a season. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to pluck up [a time to reap]."

Just like Jesus said in the sermon on the mount, "Don't fear. Consider the lilies, consider the grass, here today and gone tomorrow. Alive today and thrown in the fire tomorrow."

The fire! Don't fear?! "Yes," says Jesus. Well, that's easy for grass 'cause grass is not self-conscious, not stuck on itself, not full of itself. But I... I'm kind of into myself.

Well anyway, as Jesus is coming out of old Jerusalem, Simon appears to be trying to get in. If he came from the south he'd have gone past the Valley of Hinnom

and the Potter's Field at the bottom of that valley where it joined with Kidron Valley, and there would be a river of lamb's blood flowing toward the dead sea, which Ezekiel prophesied would one day teem with life.

Well, Simon was trying to get in, and they compelled him to carry a cross out.

Compelled... That's the way it usually happens.

You're just part of the crowd, and all at once
airplanes fly into the towers, and you're
compelled to carry a cross.

All at once the doctor says, "It's cancer."

The school nurse says, "She's sick."

You notice the bald spot on the back of your head
is bigger, and you're compelled to carry a
cross.

George MacDonald wrote, "No one can die who does not long to live." That is, if you want to die, just to die, you can't die. So you see, suicide doesn't work. For death is the loss of your will.²

Death is the surrender of your will. Simon didn't will this. So Simon was compelled. He didn't want this, but what did he want... really?

Well,

He wanted some Passover lamb.

He wanted the Exodus, to be led from bondage by
the pillar of cloud and fire, Lord of Hosts.

He wanted to be led to the Promised Land and the
city of Jerusalem where the Holy One
dwelt in His temple.

² That would also mean masochists can't die, unless perhaps they were forced to live.

He wanted to see the Glory of God, the Son of
 Man coming on the clouds of heaven and
 claim His kingdom, gathering the elect,
 reaping them from the nations.

He wanted to celebrate that harvest at the
 Messianic banquet with broken bread and
 sweet, red wine.

He just wanted a glimpse, perhaps the faintest
 touch, smell, or taste... just enough to
 nurture a longing, a distant hope, deep
 within his gut, hope in the Holy One of
 Israel.

But now where was he? He was yoked to an
 unclean, corpse of a man, obviously cursed, beaten to
 within an inch of His life, outside the city, carrying the
 heaviest burden, the hardest yoke a man can carry.
 Carrying a cross, out of Jerusalem, toward the hill of the
 skull.

Can you imagine what's going through Simon's mind?

Where's God?

How can He allow such evil in this world?

I thought He was sovereign.

I thought He was in control.

Does He even know?

Does He even care?

Could I ever know Him?

Where's God?

Where's the meaning?

Where is the way, the truth, and the life?

Freedom?

How can I get out of here into the kingdom, into the

city where I'll forget this ever happened?
 Forget this walk with death and shame, and deny I
 was ever here.

Where is that Son of Man, that God-cursed
 Son of Man?

I must be cursed.

I must be damned, like this
 wretched man next to me.

My religion is not working.

I should have stayed in Cyrene.

I'm lost.

Recently I've been getting anonymous e-mails from
 someone in our church that goes by the name, "El Perdido."
 It means, "the lost one." He asks the greatest questions, and
 I attempt to answer.

Here's a sampling of what "El Perdido" writes,

I want to know how Christians can give God
 the credit for all the great and wonderful
 things that happen and then not give him
 credit for all of the evil that happens. . .
 .How do you just let God off the hook? . . .
 [Is He off the hook?] I have. . . begged and
 pleaded Him to show me who He truly is. . .
 . He doesn't seem to be personally involved.
 It seems that either He is totally involved
 and lets totally f'd up things go on, and He
 just stands by watching, or He isn't at all
 present. . . . It seems that He isn't knowable.
 If He isn't knowable how can He be worthy
 of trust? I just want to understand a
 little better. I just want something to hang

onto that I can KNOW. I want to believe that He is good, that He is involved and present, that things that happen in this world are for a greater good and that it isn't just out of His control. I want to know Him and to trust Him. . . . Is there anything that you can say to me that would sway me to believe that God is good and worthy of my heart?
Thank you,
El Perdido

Well, I've written various things to El Perdido, but I'd like to say this publicly. El Perdido,

You are Simon.

You are Simon, and you're in the process of being found, and He's in the process of revealing His glory. You're in the process of being made in His image. You're in the process of dying with Jesus and rising from the dead.

You're Simon. So keep walking and keep searching and keep your eyes open. Don't close your eyes. Don't close your heart in fear. Don't fear the reaper because, Simon, God is revealed in the last place the world thinks to look... a cross.

I'm saying this publicly because we're all El Perdido, and we're all Simon, and if we can surrender our fear in faith so that we don't close the eyes of our hearts but continue to seek, to walk...

We will begin to see where we once feared to look.
 We will begin to see a man strapped to a cross, our cross.
 He's been walking beside us all along.

Keep your eye on Him.

He may look like death, but He is life.

At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. . . . Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Hebrews 2:6-9, 2:14-15 (ESV)

Deliver them... like an Exodus. Strange exodus.

Well, Simon bears Jesus' cross. Paul wrote, "In my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's affliction," and "I bear on my body the marks of Christ." "I have been crucified with Christ."

Simon bears Jesus' cross, but Jesus is bearing Simon's cross. Jesus is being crucified for Simon's sins. And not just Simon's, but the sins of the whole world. So He not only tastes death, but is damned on the world's behalf.

So Simon is just tasting what Jesus bore on his behalf. Even though he doesn't yet know it. He couldn't yet

know it for if he did, he couldn't truly taste it (confusion, anguish, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!", Passover, Jesus, the communion of the cross). He's tasting, and then he'll know.

The young disciple said to the great Rabbi, "I love you." The Rabbi said, "Do you know what hurts me, my son?" The young disciple said, "I don't understand. I'm trying to say, 'I love you.'" The Rabbi said, "If you don't know what hurts me, how can you say you love me. You don't know me."

Jesus said,

If any would be my disciple let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whomever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

And He said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The cross is the only yoke I see Jesus bearing in scripture, and He bears it with Simon. Is it easy? Is it light?

Crosses kill people.

But maybe sometimes we're supposed to die.

Like we said when we preached on this passage, "We are our own painful yoke and unbearable burden."

His cross releases us from our painful and heavy burden, the self. We are our own deepest prison. We are enslaved within ourselves, stuck on ourselves, full of ourselves, worried about ourselves, frightened for ourselves. That's why we fear the reaper.

Well, the cross kills me. I am trapped in “me,” the “me” that I think I’ve made, the illusion that I can make “me.” I can create “me.” That I am my own Creator, that I make “me” with “me” according to the law, the knowledge of good and evil. But that “me” is illusion, darkness, and lies. That “me” is sin.

And then believing I am my own creator, I can’t see my true Creator who is love, that I experience as mercy.

Unable to receive love, I can’t give love. I’m cut off in Hades, Hell, full of me, full of self, full of clay, full of dust... nothing. “Who will descend into my prison and deliver my spirit from this body of death?” Who will be my Exodus?

Well, look Simon, someone’s with you.
You see but don’t see because you fear the reaper, but Simon...

You’re walking with the Passover Lamb.

You’re walking with the Pillar of Fire and Cloud,
the Lord of Hosts.

He’s taking you on an Exodus journey from the
land of the dead.

You’re walking out of old Jerusalem so you can
walk into the new.

The Messiah came to old Jerusalem, but she was full of herself and could not receive her Maker, her Husband, her Groom, the Seed.³

Simon, you are Jerusalem. You are the temple. You are the bride. You’re being emptied in order to be filled with grace and glory... life.

³ Her Maker will now crush her, destroy her, make her again. She’s already being remade. She’s already being emptied.

Last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday. At the Living Stones service, we put ashes on everyone's forehead, reminding them, "dust to dust and ashes to ashes," but "believe the Gospel."

Well, dust and water make clay and from the clay the potter makes earthen vessels.

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels so the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us," writes Paul, "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh."

After the service, one of our artists, a sculptor named Kent Smith, took me aside and told me how he makes one of his pieces of art.

He sculpts the figure out of wax. His work is in wax, but then he covers the wax in clay. Then he fires the clay which melts the wax. The wax runs out, leaving a void (the nothing). Then he pours into that emptied earthen vessel liquid fire, molten bronze, copper, or gold.

He said, "It's always a spiritual experience for me, Peter."

I think the self we make, our sinful self, is like that wax: God wraps it in clay—sinful, wretched hearts wrapped in bodies of clay. And then God melts our hearts like wax with His fiery mercy. Melts the self, the sin, like wax and then replaces the sin with grace, fills the void with mercy—the eternal substance of God... love poured out, Jesus (See Psalm 22:14-15).

Kent described the thrill of breaking off that old earthen vessel to reveal the glory and beauty inside.

This is my dad's earthen vessel. These are his ashes.



Don't freak 'cause he's no longer using them, and he's gone. Solid gold. I should say solid Jesus. Even when he was still using this stuff, walking around in his suit of clay, especially as he got older, I don't even think it was Dad who lived, but Christ who lived in Dad.

I told you how he died, how I prayed with him, "Jesus help Dad to know He can breathe You." And then a few minutes later he exhaled the wind of this world and inhaled the Spirit, the eternal wind... fully filled with God, and he was through with this dust.

We kind of don't know what to do with it. If Dad were here I think he'd say, "Shoot Peter, add some water, make some clay. Make an ashtray or a little cup like you did in 2nd grade."

See it's just the stuff that God used to make a vacuum (a void) which He then filled with Himself, which now is my dad, the real Dan Hiett, eternal in heaven.

Right now we're surrounded by heaven... love, life, grace that is, God. I think we're just afraid to breathe, just afraid to die, afraid to exhale ourselves and inhale Him. We need to die, so we can live.⁴

But dying is hard.

To die is to utterly fail,
to finally surrender the illusion of control,
to finally surrender the self you thought you made,
to finally and ultimately depend solely upon grace.

That's hard, and actually impossible for us. So Jesus came to help us die.

All your life He's helping you die so you can live. "I die every day," writes Paul.

My dad started dying and living long before He breathed his last. That's why when he breathed his last, it really wasn't that hard.

Dad helped a lot of people carry their crosses. When we help others carry their crosses, Jesus is helping us to carry ours.

And now, Simon, that wretched looking man is your Exodus. He is the Passover Lamb, the Fire and the Cloud, the Glory of God. And He is emptying you so He can fill you with molten glory, Himself.

But now, Simon, He is being emptied on your behalf in the form of a slave (Philippians 2:7). Now He is naked, exposed in weakness, the broken heart of God outside the gates of His city, His Bride.

⁴ "If the eye is unobstructed, it results in sight," says Anthony DeMello. "If the ear is unobstructed, it results in hearing. If the heart is unobstructed, it results in love." The heart is obstructed with self. When we die to self, we love.

And Simon, you are His Bride. Will you let Him into your heart? Will you let Him into your temple, to dwell in your sanctuary, to fill the empty void?

To die to yourself is to be filled with Him, like seed in fertile soil that bears fruit. That fruit is His very life. It's the harvest of this world which He reaps for all eternity.

Jesus just said, "From now on you will see the Son of Man coming." He said He would come with His messengers to gather the elect from the four winds, the nations (like Libya).

In Revelation 14 John sees, "One like the Son of Man with a sickle." He reaps the grain which becomes bread. Then another One who looks like Jesus as well, He harvests the grapes and tramples them outside the city where Jesus is crucified. The wine becomes blood. It's blood that is wine, and it makes a river that flows into Gehenna and the Dead Sea and covers all Israel to the depth of a horse's bridle.

You see,

Jesus is the Passover Lamb,
the Glory in the temple,
the Son of Man,
and Jesus is the Reaper.

He is reaping His own
body and blood,
bread and wine,
faith and mercy.
His own life, in us, for eternity.

Simon! Simon!
 Don't close your eyes.
 Don't harden your heart.
 Don't fear the Reaper.
 The Reaper is Jesus, not Satan.

Jesus is not death,
 but He has conquered death.
 He's purchased the Potter's Field.
 And now Jesus is the Reaper,
 and Jesus is the life.

You feel alone, but look to Him.
 Don't deny Him.
 Don't repress Him.
 Don't run from Him.
 That's what sin is.

Don't fear the Reaper.
 That's where evil comes from.

Don't fear the Reaper.
 He's making all things new.

Don't fear the Reaper.
 There is a time to die,
 and now it has become the time to live.

In Jesus at the cross, all the times have come. The
 Plowman has overtaken the reaper (Amos 9:13). The seed
 dies and bears fruit all at once.

Death is swallowed up in victory. Death is the
 servant of life, and life is the Reaper. Don't fear the Reaper.
 You can take His hand and follow wherever He leads. The
 Reaper is life and love.

Recently, He led a young woman from our church to India to work with the untouchables, the Dahlit. One day, girls in the slum led her to a four year old lying in the dust. Her nose was flattened, an eye clouded in blood, razor cuts across her cheeks. Puss and blood oozed from open wounds all over her body. She had been burned and beaten.

People told Becca the girl's name was Kavitha. Her mother was an alcoholic who had already killed her sister. She'd tie Kavitha to the ceiling fan with a rope by her neck and leave her for days. She burned her with cigarettes and boiling water, cut the cartilage of her nose with scissors.

The mother had been taken to the police station this day. So Becca bathed Kavitha, fed her, nursed her. Then she got the word Kavitha had to be returned to her mother in the slum. Kavitha begged to stay with Becca saying, "My mommy will kill me."

Becca writes,

Despair and hopelessness strangled my heart
as we entered the rickshaw to bring her back
to the slum.

I close my eyes and immediately I am back
standing in the street looking at Kavitha
lying beaten on the stoop. Just that morning
I prayed that Christ would empty me of
myself and fill me with Him.

As I stand there in my mind, I am alone. The
metal and cardboard shacks staring at me,
and I scream, "Why me? Why am I here,
what good can come from this?"

And as tears well up in my eyes, I hear a
voice, His voice. "You are not alone. I am

here. I am filling you. I am feeling the same anger and sadness you are feeling. As your fingers reach for her they become My fingers. And as she sits on your lap, it becomes My lap. And, and not only that, but I am in Kavitha. And I am her. I have been with her everyday, tied to the ceiling fan; even now I feel pain in my hands, on my face, on my back. It is my eyes that you are looking into, my body that you are so gently hugging. And, and even more I am with her mother. For I have come to love the sinner, the prostitute, tax collector, and child abuser.”

“What?!” I cry. “You are here in the horror. You feel Kavitha’s pain and my pain, how can You possibly...?”

“Yeah, My love reaches that far. And just as I fill you, I dream of filling her [Kavitha’s mother], for I feel her pain, too.”

“But I can’t! I can’t go to her. I hate her.”

Yet, even as these words pour from my mouth I know the Truth. And He says, “Then let Me.” And He fills me. And He fills you. And He longs to fill...

(Becca Saby, November 25, 2005)

And so He took bread and broke it saying, This is my body. Take and eat. And He took the cup saying “This is my blood of the covenant. Drink of it all of you for the forgiveness of sins.”

His body broken and His blood shed. Simon was compelled to taste it. Mark points out that Simon was father to two sons who appear to be well known to the church in Rome (Alexander and Rufus).

Paul writes, “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother who mothered me.” That must have been Simon’s wife... Simon who was chosen.

See, it appears Simon bore great fruit. He surrendered his heart to the Reaper.

They say another Simon, Simon Peter, died outside of Rome. He had a vision of Jesus and ran to be crucified with Him. He had missed his chance to carry Christ’s cross years before, and maybe now he was jealous of his friend in Rome, Simon of Cyrene.

Whatever the case, he didn’t fear the Reaper. He loved Him and longed to KNOW Him. He longed to be with Him where He was.

You can be with Him, too. Come commune with Him in His death and His resurrection. Be there.

Blessed be Your name, Jesus. You are the Lord. We surrender our lives to you. Our lives belong to You. You’re the Reaper. You are the One that reaps our lives. You are the One that harvests faith and mercy from Your people, Your body, the harvest of this earth. And so we surrender our hearts to You, Lord Jesus. Speak to our hearts.

We’ve been preaching on suicide for the last few weeks. Some of you have probably been tempted. Someone told me last night about people committing suicide to that

song, “Don’t Fear the Reaper.”

Satan’s not the Reaper. That’s a lie from hell.

It’s ironic, but because you fear death, you also fear life, and so you’re tempted to control your death and control your life with suicide. That is evil. The self full of self and full of fear. But surrender your life to the Reaper, who is Jesus, who is life, who is love, who is grace, and who makes all things new.

So say, “Lord Jesus, Satan is not my Reaper. Lord Jesus, You are my Reaper. I surrender my death and I surrender my life to You.”

And now listen to these lyrics once again.

“All our times have come”
[They all meet at the cross.]

“Seasons don’t fear the reaper”
[Observe the lilies and the grass of the field]

“Valentine”
[Was a saint who died for love.]

“Romeo and Juliet”
[Were fictional characters who tragically meet in death. Suicide is heinous sin, but we meet Jesus, our lover at His cross.]

“Love of two is one. . .
Came the last night of sadness. . .
Then the door was open”
[He is the door.]

“The curtains flew”
[The curtain in the temple ripped.]

“then he appeared...”
[Jesus rose from the dead and said to the strange women, “Don t be afraid.”]

So you can take His hand, Bride of Christ, and one fine morning you’ll fly away. In the end, every love song is about Jesus ‘cause we were made for Him.

So Bride of Christ, you’re called to die daily. But one day you’ll be done dying and breathe your last.

Don’t fear that day. Don’t fear the Reaper The Reaper is your Bridegroom. And He, my dear, is not grim.

The prince of darkness grim,
but we tremble not for him.
His rage we can endure.
For lo his doom is sure.
One little word shall fell him.

And that’s our word, Jesus, He’s our Reaper. In His name, amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

It has been testified somewhere, “What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.” Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely

Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. . . . Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Hebrews 2:6-9, 2:14-15 (ESV)

All our times have come
Here but now they're gone
Seasons don't fear the reaper
Nor do the wind, the sun or the rain...we can be like they are

Come on baby...don't fear the reaper
Baby take my hand...don't fear the reaper
We'll be able to fly...don't fear the reaper
Baby I'm your man...

Valentine is done
Here but now they're gone
Romeo and Juliet
Are together in eternity...Romeo and Juliet

40,000 men and women everyday...Like Romeo and Juliet
40,000 men and women everyday...Redefine happiness
Another 40,000 coming everyday...We can be like they are

Come on baby...don't fear the reaper
Baby take my hand...don't fear the reaper
We'll be able to fly...don't fear the reaper
Baby I'm your man...

Love of two is one
Here but now they're gone
Came the last night of sadness
And it was clear she couldn't go on
Then the door was open and the wind appeared
The candles blew then disappeared
The curtains flew then he appeared...
saying don't be afraid

Come on baby...and she had no fear
 And she ran to him...then they started to fly
 They looked backward and said goodbye...
 she had become like they are
 She had taken his hand...she had become like they are

Come on baby...don't fear the reaper
 Come on baby...don't fear the reaper
 Come on baby...don't fear the reaper

Blue Oyster Cult, "Don't Fear the Reaper"

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. . . . Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." . . . Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." . . . And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on

him and led him away to crucify him. As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.

Matthew 6:24-34, 11:28-30, 16:24-25, 27:31-2 (ESV)

The cross is laid on every Christian. It begins with the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with His death—we give over our lives to death. Since this happens at the beginning of the Christian life, the cross can never be merely a tragic ending to an otherwise happy religious life. When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

And here in dust and dirt, O here,
The lilies of his love appear.

George Herbert

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Romans 6:5-7 (ESV)

He tasted death on behalf of all others. He is the representative “Di-er” of the universe: and for that very reason the Resurrection and the Life. Or conversely, because He truly lives, He truly dies, for that is the very pattern of reality. Because the higher can descend into the lower He who from all eternity has been incessantly plunging Himself in the blessed death of self-surrender to the Father can also most fully descend into the horrible and (for us) involuntary death of the body. Because Vicariousness is the very idiom of the reality He has created, his death can become ours.

C.S. Lewis, Miracles

For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who

lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:18-20 (ESV)

I had a cool, really cool, vision about 10 years ago. I was standing with Jesus along a parade route. We were watching a parade of sorts going by of all different shapes, sizes and colors of caskets. There was a pure glass casket going by, beautiful beyond description. Flowers surrounded the box, music playing, people marching. Everyone was having a gay time. As I peering into the glass casket I could see myself—dead! I wasn't really fearful, but I asked Jesus, "Am I dead? Am I going to die soon? Why am I in the casket?" He said, ever so gently, "Marcia, you are not in the casket. You are standing with me. You are alive." It was then I realized that it was my flesh that had died. When I turned to tell Him He, as He always does, was gone. It's kind of a sign between Jesus and me that I get it or at least some of it. I had begun to die to my flesh. It is truly one of my favorite visions!

Marcia Hinds

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 (ESV)

I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:31 (NIV)

"For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. . . . Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send

out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” . . . Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Matthew 16:27-28, 24:30-35, 26:64 (ESV)

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia.

Revelation 14:13-20 (ESV)

So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” . . . And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you,

unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. . . . I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 6:53-56, 12:23-24, 15:5 (ESV)

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Acts 13:1 (ESV)

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

Mark 15:21 (ESV)

Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.

Romans 16:13 (ESV)

“Must I?” said Eustace. ~ “Yes,” said Aslan. ~ Then Eustace set his teeth and drove the thorn into the Lion’s pad. And there came out a great drop of blood, redder than all redness that you have ever seen or imagined. And it splashed into the stream over the dead body of the King. At the same moment the doleful music stopped. And the dead King began to be changed. His white beard turned to grey, and from grey to yellow and got shorter and vanished altogether; and his sunken cheeks grew round and fresh, and the wrinkles were smoothed, and his eyes opened, and his eyes and lips both laughed, and suddenly he leaped up and stood before them—a very young man, or a boy. (But Jill couldn’t say which, because of people having no particular ages in Aslan’s country. Even in this world, or course, it is the stupidest children who are most childish and the stupidest grown-ups who are most grown-up.) And he rushed to Aslan and flung his arms as far as they would go round the huge neck; and gave Aslan the strong kisses of a King, and Aslan gave him the wild kisses of a Lion. ~ At last Caspian turned to the others. He gave a great laugh of astonished joy. . . . Eustace made a step towards him with both hands held out, but then drew back with a startled expression. ~ “Look here! I say,” he stammered. “It’s all very well. But aren’t you?—I mean didn’t you—?” ~ “Oh, don’t be such an ass,” said Caspian. ~ “But,” said Eustace,

looking at Aslan. "Hasn't he—er—died?" ~ "Yes," said the lion in a very quiet voice, almost (Jill thought) as if he were laughing. "He has died. Most people have, you know. Even I have. There are very few who haven't."

C.S. Lewis, The Silver Chair

Peter,

At intimate worship tonight (3-15-06) Tanya Lyons came up to me and told me that earlier this week, she was at the park and met a woman from India. They got to talking, and Tanya asked her if she knew what the name "Kavitha" meant (Tanya said that she had a feeling that the name had some significance).

The Indian woman told her that Kavitha means "poem".

Is that cool or what? My mind went to Ephesians 2:10

"For we are His Kavitha, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Aram

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