

Cemeteries And Lessons Learned

A number of years ago, Regena and I took on the job of mowing the Antioch community cemetery. Every two weeks from July to the end of the mowing season, we were out there mowing around the tombstones, picking up flowers, trimming, and sweeping off the graves. This is the cemetery where my parents are laid to rest now. I found myself thinking a lot about those who were buried there and want to share my thoughts.

First, some of the older graves date back to the 1800's. They lived their lives, had their families, and then passed away. That generation was followed by another generation, etcetera. We were the young generation and are now entering that older generation stage. The Bible speaks of life being brief in numerous passages. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Peter 1.24-25).

A number of tombstones are simply rocks without names and dates. I don't know if anyone really knows much about those folks or if they have been totally forgotten. But each generation will eventually be forgotten. How many generations in your family can you name? I can go back to my great-grandfather Robert Tucker and Artemis, no further back than that. Perhaps you can do better but I doubt if many can name off more than four or five generations. It does not mean they were not important, for obviously if my great-grandfather and grandmother had not lived, I would not be here. While we may forget those before us, God remembers everyone. "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity'" (2 Timothy 2.19). On the Day of Judgment, every individual will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5.10. God knows those who named His Son and lived faithfully to His will and those who did not.

In this cemetery, there are six graves with tombstones in the shape of crosses. They are not fancy and are made of concrete. What stands out about these crosses is that they were all babies who died within the first year of their birth. My great-grandfather and his wife lost every other child. Some of their children died at or right after their birth and others made it almost a year. They had six who lived and six who died. Those who lived past that first year lived good long lives. But it made me realize how both the young and old die. We know friends and family who passed away while still young. Death does not go by a clock or calendar it simply happens. We need to always be ready for that time. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For

what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." (James 4.13-15).

Some of those graves were of men who died in the military. I appreciate those who fought to protect our freedoms. Some came back home alive, some came back home in a box, and some did not come back at all. I tend to forget the sacrifices others made for my family and me. I also thought of Jesus who paid the price for our salvation. He died so we can live. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10.11). We can also think of the apostles and disciples who refused to denounce the name of Christ and were fed to lions, or burned at stakes, or beheaded.

There are now two special graves in this cemetery, my Dad's and Mom's. We miss them, but I am sure they would be pleased to see me and my family taking care of their graves. They would be even more pleased to see us worshipping and serving God. With Dad, the spiritual came first and the physical was second. We all need to make sure we have our priorities right. God comes first and we come in second. Going to heaven is more important than anything else. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6.33).

Finally, I felt a sense of responsibility to the families whose loved ones were buried in this cemetery. I wanted to make sure every grave was trimmed properly, flowers put back in place, and head stones swept. I would want people to do the same for my family. – Dennis Tucker.