

Requiescat in Pace – William O. Berglin, Jr.
Revelation 12:7-17
Ephesians 2:1-10
John 10:1-18

That first reading, the reading from the book of Revelation – it's dramatic. Michael, the archangel, leads his angels against Satan and the forces of darkness. It is a cosmic struggle of good versus evil. Satan, the ancient dragon, is thrown down. There was one line in the middle of that reading that captures the whole thing: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Revelation 12:11, NIV). Michael is valiant. Michael is a protector. That's what a man is supposed to be. A man, by his very nature, is called upon to sacrifice for those in his care. A man stands up to threats that would bring harm to those he loves, irrespective of the cost that he must bear. A man, a husband, a father, is to instill a sense of security in those under his protection – that he is standing vigil, a sentinel against danger, the first line and last line of defense. "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."

Billy knew this; in his bones, Billy knew this. William O. Berglin, Jr. aspired to be that man, that protector, that valiant fellow who would shield his family and those dear to him. Oh, he was brash; a Harley-riding, BBQ loving, Budweiser-swilling, Jack-sipping, stubborn Swedish Polack; but more than any of that, Billy knew what a man was supposed to be. Gentle but strong; compassionate but a fierce defender of the truth; empathetic but possessing a tireless work ethic; Billy knew what a man was supposed to be. I know that it's no surprise to you, but virtue didn't originate with Billy or with Michael the archangel for that matter. There's a reason that men aspire to virtue. There's a reason that virtue invades the soul of man. There's a reason that we are compelled to act better than our base nature. Virtue has an origin. Life has an origin. Forgiveness has an origin.

Billy was baptized, as a youth in Racine, at The Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. The Lord Christ shares His life. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, He is the origin of virtue. He is the origin of life. He is the origin of forgiveness. When Billy was baptized, the Lord Christ made His home in Billy. Virtue flooded Billy's soul as He was baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection. The blood of the Lamb was in that water. Blood which was shed on a cross two thousand years ago, God tucks that blood in the water of holy baptism. That's what washed Billy – Christ's blood. Billy needed someone to defend him. There are forces in this world that no ordinary man can surmount. You know that is the truth. Sin and death are forces that none of you can contend with on your own. Remarkably, the Son of God is the quintessential man. He came into this world not out of His own interests, but to defend you, to protect you, to save you. True God and true man in one person, Jesus is the greatest defender that you will ever have. Congestive heart failure was what brought Billy's life to an end in this world. What was going to save Billy from death?

I read an account of Billy's youth written by his brother Gary. A lot of it reminded me of my own youth. Lots of adrenaline; lots of testosterone; his pals will tell you that Billy knew how to live. He knew how to ride a bike. He knew how to drive a truck. He knew how to clean his

pool. He knew how to grill a steak. He'd done those things over and over. But he didn't know how to die. Billy had never done that. Regrets; he had those. Have you ever had your conscience accuse you in the dark watches of the night? The law is merciless. We have transgressed the law of God. The base accusation is this: We have not loved God above all things and we have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. Every man knows the particulars of their own behavior. The particulars are what haunts. The wages of sin is death. Billy earned death by his behavior. I am exactly the same. Billy knew how to live. Did he know how to die?

Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. He contrasts Himself with a hire hand. When the hired hand sees a wolf coming – a menacing creature who wants only to devour, a creature who loves death, who feasts on the vulnerable – when the hired hand sees the wolf he turns tail and runs. He doesn't care for the sheep. The hired hand cares only about his own hide. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep. Imagine the innocent Son of God being sentenced to crucifixion. The wolf is drooling in anticipation of sinking his fangs into the flesh of the Son of God. Death was hungry for the Prince of Life. Jesus too was eager for the confrontation. He said: "No one takes my life from me but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again" (John 10:18). Ironically, the Good Shepherd is also the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

As He is crucified all the sin of humanity, all the filth, all the depravity and selfishness and corruption, all the idolatry and hate and vanity of fallen man is heaped on Him, located in Him. Christ bore it. That's why He came. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us. And He died. For you; for Billy; the Source of Life died; Christ died for sin, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. Jesus destroys death by dying. He had the authority. He had the authority to lay down His life and He had the authority to take it up again. He rose. The tomb is empty. Death is shattered on the floor. Sinners are forgiven and life springs from that garden tomb – Christ is risen! Death has no sting. The risen Savior was with Billy when he died. Jesus knew how to die and He brought Billy through death into life eternal.

Billy had a Protector. Divine Love protected Billy. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for Billy. Tough, weathered, leathery Billy was and is Christ's little lamb. There's a children's hymn that William O. Berglin learned as a youth. I'm going to quote two stanzas of that hymn. Here's the first. I am Jesus' little lamb, Ever glad at heart I am; For my Shepherd gently guides me, Knows my need and well provides me, Loves me ev'ry day the same, Even calls me by my name. The final stanza captures this day. "Who so happy as I am, Even now the Shepherd's lamb? And when my short life is ended, By His angel host attended, He shall fold me to His breast, There within His arms to rest."

Billy has a Good Shepherd, a Protector. The source of all virtue laid down His life for Billy and rose again. Jesus prepared a place for Billy in His Father's house. Whether he knew it or not, Easter defined Billy's life on this earth. Christ is risen and heaven is our home. Faith as small as a mustard seed is saving faith. St. Paul wrote this: "Christ came to save sinners of whom I am chief." All of us sinners, we are saved by grace, a free gift of Divine Love. Grace sheltered Billy in life. Grace brought him home. You all have a God who loves you. You all have a God who gave Himself up for you. He knows your grief. He will comfort you in the dark watches of

the night. His forgiveness isn't a platitude; it's real and strong and true and present. It's for all of us. It is most certainly for Billy Berglin.