

Louie: A Homily

By Louis Venden

My name is Louis, too. I went by “Louie” the first thirty years of my life, then more recently I have been “Lou.” You see, the one we’ve come to remember and honor got his name because of mine; because of our treasured ties to his parents.

That’s very special. It means a great deal to me. That’s part of why I’m here. Join me in thinking a bit about the reasons we’ve come together today.

In many ways, we’re a very diverse group, thinking of things such as age, background, experience. We come from different religious faith perspectives.

There are those who come perhaps find-

ing little or no meaning in God talk or traditional religion. There may be others who are searching and wondering. But with all of our diversity, we come together because of one special person. We’re drawn here by Louie; by one we’ve known, loved, and lost—for now.

I’m reminded of those words by Emily Dickinson:

The Bustle in a House
The Morning after Death
Is solemnest of industries
Enacted upon Earth—

The Sweeping up the Heart
And putting Love away
We shall not want to use again
Until Eternity



We can say we've come because of family ties. Literally, of course, but then in an extended sense. In one way or another we're all part of Louie's family.

We're here to acknowledge how fragile we are. The song we've just heard is right.

On and on the rain will fall
Like tears from a star.
On and on the rain will say
How fragile we are.

Another part of why we've come is because of our fragileness. We need one another. We need to believe in each other, to value one another in all the diversity that we represent. To value ourselves and out of our gathering to be more thoughtful and accepting of each other. And to make the world a better place because of our common bond with Louie.

We've come to bear one another's burdens. We've come to share tears and to share memories. Each one of us in one way or another has a personal untarnished treasure that has Louie in the center. We come remembering his wonderful creativity, his commitments, idealism, and honesty; his wanting to be "real."

We come perhaps needing to let go of conclusions and of judgments, to forgive. To forgive Louie for not meeting, not living up to our expectations—what we might have thought or hoped he would be and do.

We wouldn't really want him back to face the darkness and the pain that meant for him life could not go on. We'd rather have him be at rest. We need to remember that all of us are broken and our failures simply have different names and take different forms. The good news is that God in Christ has forgiven us and so we can be forgiving and accepting of one another. We can let go of judging—of judging Louie, a beloved child of God.

And we need to forgive ourselves. That's immensely important, too. We may remember little signals that we wish we had followed up on. There may be the torture of "what if" and "if only" kind of regrets. Together we can help one another let go of blaming ourselves or someone else.

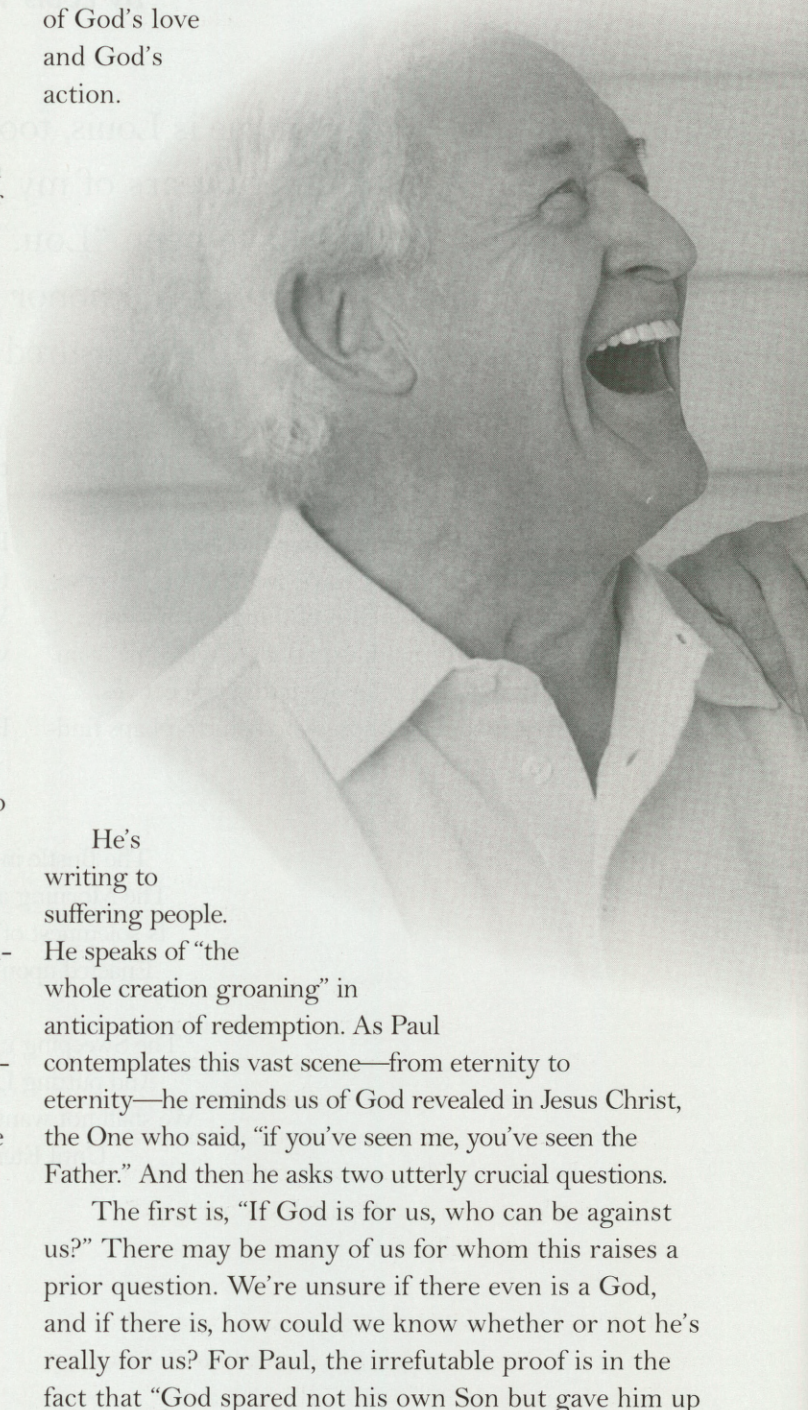
Many of us have come looking for help from beyond ourselves; help from the One the Apostle Paul calls "the Father of mercies; the God of all comfort." Help from the One we see with tears in his eyes at his

friend's grave in the little town of Bethany. The One of whom it was said he would be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

In his letter to people in the city of Rome, Paul highlights the wonder and glory of the good news he's proclaimed. He wants us to get the big picture—an immense picture. He takes us into God's purpose and plan from an eternity past to an eternity future. And he calls us to place our suffering and our grief in the context of God's love and God's action.

He's writing to suffering people. He speaks of "the whole creation groaning" in anticipation of redemption. As Paul contemplates this vast scene—from eternity to eternity—he reminds us of God revealed in Jesus Christ, the One who said, "if you've seen me, you've seen the Father." And then he asks two utterly crucial questions.

The first is, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" There may be many of us for whom this raises a prior question. We're unsure if there even is a God, and if there is, how could we know whether or not he's really for us? For Paul, the irrefutable proof is in the fact that "God spared not his own Son but gave him up



for us all.” Paul is pointing to Calvary’s cross. That’s how far God has gone to prove his love. You can count on it! He is for us!

But another urgent question remains. “Who (or what) can separate us from the love of Christ?” Paul lists just about every disaster you can think of—powers, forces, events that could make you wonder—perhaps leading us to conclude that we’ve been cut off, abandoned. Then over against this dark picture he proclaims his personal conclusion:

“I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither messenger of Heaven nor monarch of earth, neither what happens today nor what might happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power from below, nor anything else in all God’s whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39 Phillips).

Did you get that? Here’s his answer to question number two: “Who or what can separate us?” Nothing! Can we grasp that word in all its meaning? Take it

deep within our minds and hearts? This could be a very tough challenge. There’s tragic confusion and distortion in ideas that our place with God—God’s love for us—is somehow, in some way, conditioned upon how well we do; that some habit, thought, or action on our part will alienate God. But the text says “nothing” can do that. Do we believe this deep inside?

Is it true, as someone has put it, “there is nothing that you can do that will make God love you more, and there is nothing we can do that will make him love us less”? Isn’t Paul’s answer, “Absolutely”?

If we take the “nothing” of Paul’s answer to heart we can be certain that God loves Louie with a present and eternal love, no matter what. God cares and is about his work of caring in our lives and in our world—no matter what. That’s a radical, boundless love. Love to the nth degree.

So we can know in whose hands Louie rests. The final word about Louie is not some tragic and fatal act. The final word is that he is a loved child of God. And ours is to give up judging and to trust him to the safety and security of the Everlasting Arms. The arms of the One who loves and cares for him—who has and will for all eternity.

The Bible has a great word for that truth, my friends. That word is *grace*. And it is amazing!

Let’s pray.

Our gracious Lord—Father of mercies, God of all comfort. You know the thoughts of our hearts, each one of us. And we know something of your heart. You gave your Son at Calvary. And you alone can give comfort to a father and mother—to a brother and sisters—give comfort to us all that comes from your great heart of love.

We’re thankful for the good treasure, untarnished—of memories of a very special son of yours, Louie. The things that he stood for, that he believed in and the way he reached out to make a difference in our world. What he was gives challenge and encouragement to our lives.

We’re grateful that we can trust him to you—to your boundless love and to your grace, and we do so, dear God, in the name of your Son, Amen.

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