

## Numbering Our Days Aright with Jesus

† **Our Brother – perfect through suffering (vv.10-13)**

† **Our Priest – helpful in temptation (vv.14-19)**

In the name of Jesus, God's eternal Son, **Our Priest** and **Our Brother**, dear trusting Christians:

Some of you may remember a children's lesson five or ten years ago about a WELS missionary pinned down by rebel gunfire on a beach in Albania. His situation was especially tense with his wife and daughter there. Finally an Italian navy gunship pulled in close enough to take them to safety.

That was missionary Kirby Spevacek who later took a Call to teach at the ministerial training school on the Apache Indian Reservation in Arizona. His oldest of five daughters, one of my high school students just before I came here in 1986, married our second Apache pastor in about 100 years. His youngest daughter Roxy was a good friend of our Sarah, and they spent Spring Break 2003 together on the "Res," as Roxy called it. Last Monday, Christmas morning, only two miles from Grace Lutheran Church in Glendale, Arizona, the three of them were hit broadside. In an instant everything changed.

We prayed in our New Year's Eve Psalm: "**Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**" (Psalm 90:12 NIV) Church is one of the safest places in the world. Some people drive so slowly to church in Shoreview, you can almost see the moss growing under their tires. Do they really want to go? Do we? Or does someone have to drag us? If it takes a funeral to get us to church, if our minds are somewhere else when we're here, are we **Numbering Our Days Aright with Jesus?**

† **Our Brother – perfect through suffering (vv.10-13)**

"**We must pay more careful attention....**" (Hebrews 2:1 NIV) How many times have you had a close call and didn't even realize someone else was watching out for you? Another, more attentive driver, perhaps, but most certainly the Lord's holy angels. We delete the memory and ride on without thinking that not just our bodies but our souls are in constant danger. Lulling us to sleep is one of Satan's tried and lying tactics. Feeling great can give the liar from hell multiple targets when **suffering** comes our way.

"**We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.**" (Hebrews 2:1 NIV) What have we heard about **suffering**? Can we bring it on ourselves? Most certainly. What happens when families drift away from church and Sunday School? Maybe it would be helpful if they had a flat tire every day until they came back. But God is a kindhearted gentleman. The Lover of our souls wants to treat us with kindness. God keeps calling us back to His grace and blessings while He "**causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**" (Matthew 5:45 NIV) Is that how we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?

Sometimes people won't shake my hand at the door; they don't want me to suffer their cold or flu. We feel guilty if we spread germs to humans or viruses to computers. If we caused a deadly crash, it would be hard for us to go on. Yet our natural born arrogance ignores the worst **suffering** we caused for **Our Brother**, born of the virgin on that first Christmas so long ago. Because of us **Our Baby Brother** had to die. Our careless lack of love for our neighbor, our continuous self-absorption are sins that crucified God's own Son. Some people think only a cruel God would come up with such a plan of salvation by sacrifice. So they cruelly reject the One who gave His life of love for them and for all. We ourselves continue to grieve God's heart by our rebellious attitude against God's Word, our distraction by worldly pleasures, our abuse of our neighbor by ignoring his need for Christ and forgiveness.

That's why "**the author of [our] salvation**" had to be made "**perfect through suffering.**" Jesus had a job to do for people who could not help themselves. We sinners glory in our own talents, intellect, and strength – all the way to the grave, into the torment of gnashing teeth as if we could blame God for all

eternity. He created all things; we insist they evolved. He loves all people; we claim He can't or else He wouldn't damn anyone. God wants to bring us to the glory of heaven, but we're all wrapped up in the tinsel of earth. And when **suffering** does come our way, we question, "Why?" or shake our fist, "Why me?" But sin and conscience scream, "Why not?" Our rebellion ripped us from the family of God.

Yet isn't it amazing how intent God is on getting us back? One Old Testament passage after another quoted the eternal Christ centuries before He was born as Jesus of Nazareth that first Christmas. Does Christ sound excited, or what? *"He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again he says, 'Here am I, and the children God has given me.'"* What did it take for God to reconcile us to Himself as His dear children? *"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers."* God's goal was to make Jesus a Savior so kind, we could not turn away, our understanding **Brother** to forgive and love us eternally, unconditionally. God gave the One who would always know what we were going through before the pain arrived. Jesus is **Our Brother – perfect through suffering** for our sins on the cross. Are we **Numbering Our Days Aright with Jesus?**

### † **Our Priest – helpful in temptation (vv.14-19)**

Years of dangerous work as a missionary in Africa – Kirby Spevacek trained my brother-in-law to serve congregations out in the bush where roads turned to seas of mud during the rainy season and junkyards for bombed out rebel vehicles during the dry. On to Czechoslovakia and safe extraction from that violent Albanian beach. More dangers on the Reservation where my tiny mind imagined the accident. Surely not city streets two miles from church! Wouldn't all those years of service free him and his family from a catastrophic "T-bone"? Would you be safer with God if you could give more hours to church work or bigger offerings or a better life? How do we get close to God? Is anyone safe?

We ran from God with Adam in the garden. We prove to be "a chip off the old block" by passing deadly sin from one generation to another without even knowing it. God could have dumped us then; His mercy would not let Him. Our heavenly Father's love would not yield to our stubborn rebellion. But what was God to do? *"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."* We are saved by grace alone.

Can you imagine Adam and Eve going back to the gate of Eden, tearfully wishing they could have one "do over"? If only the cherubim were not there with the *"flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life"*! (Genesis 3:24) Look again. The Christ of Christmas says, "Come in." As one of our hymn writers put it: *"For us he opens wide the door Of paradise today. The angel guards the gate no more; To God our thanks we pay, To God our thanks we pay."* (CW 41:6) *"For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."* Trials and temptations soften with Jesus by our bed.

"Be near me, Lord Jesus," we pray for Kirby Spevacek and Roxy. His wife, Audrey, Roxy's mother, died in the crash. Audrey was home with Jesus before Christmas Day was done. Kirby's prognosis for recovery looks good. Roxy's head injuries are severe. But Jesus is at their bedside, with the doctors and nurses, with Roxy's sisters and their husbands, with the grandchildren. At times like these **Numbering Our Days Aright with Jesus** makes all the sense in the world. But **Our Brother, Our Priest** will shine heaven's eternal glory on us. **Jesus** is the only Name that saves. In the midst of life we are in death. *"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."* Amen.