

FUNERAL OF IAN RUHBERG HENDRICKSON | FEBRUARY 1, 2025
PSALM 23 | REVELATION 22:1-5 | JOHN 10:11-16

C.S. Lewis once wrote: “Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal... Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, [your heart] will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.”

It would be wonderful to go through life without experiencing grief. It would mean no sad funerals. No trying to find the words to say goodbye. No old memory stirred up when you hear their favorite song. Life without grief would be much easier and simpler.

But it would come at a great cost. It would mean never loving another person. And it would mean never fully receiving their love in return. Saving ourselves from the pain of grief would mean denying ourselves the joys of living. A heart that can't break is also a heart that no longer beats.

Thankfully, most of us have chosen the latter option. To receive love from others and give it in return. And we've chosen that even though it means opening ourselves up to loss in the process. We all bear those losses in different ways. Those of us who have experienced the death of family, friends, and loved ones can all attest to that. But no one experiences that loss more acutely than parents who have lost children.

While everyone experiences grief in some form throughout their lives, the kind of grief that losing a child creates is one that few people can fully understand. Certainly not me. Certainly not most of the people here this morning. Not even most of the people you would find in a grief support group.

And yet even this deepest of pains is felt, known, and understood by God. God who wipes away all tears. God who knows the weight of our hearts. God who knows what it is like to lose a child.

So, Jennie and Mike, your pain is also God's pain. And so even if you feel isolated in your bereavement, remember that you are not grieving alone. Your grief isn't only real and valid and something you shouldn't try to “get over.” (Never let anyone tell you that.) It's also something God feels with you.

God shares our pain because God's heart is always open to us. In today's gospel reading, Jesus calls himself the good shepherd. Unlike the hired hands who leave their sheep when danger approaches, Jesus always stays with his sheep. The difference between Jesus and the hired hands, St. John tells us, is not that Jesus is a more skilled shepherd. The difference is that Jesus's sheep are his own. They belong to him. “I know my own,” Jesus says, “And my own know me.”

In the brief time I knew Ian, I was always impressed by how many people knew him. It seemed like the entire hospital staff was on a first-name basis with him. As you alluded to in Ian's obituary, that close knowing is a sign of love and compassion. And if you want an

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example of Christ's care, you can find it in the medical professionals who tended to him during his life, who didn't just treat him but cared for him. These people didn't just know *about* Ian. They *knew* Ian. And that knowing is what has made all the difference.

A couple of days after Ian was born, he was baptized in his hospital room. And something very important happened that day. Ian became Christ's own. Ian and Christ were bound together in the power of the Holy Spirit so that he received God's unending life. From that day on, the only death Ian ever had to fear was already behind him. And so even as we grieve today, we do not grieve without hope. Because we know that even though Ian has died, his life in God has not ended.

"I know my own," Jesus says. Even in death, Christ knows his own. Christ knows Ian's smile. He knows Ian's laugh. He knows Ian's love.

"And," Jesus says, "My own know me." Now in death, Ian knows the fullness of God's love. He knows the tenderness of God's compassion. He knows the voice of the one who calls him by name.

May Ian rest in light perpetual, knowing God as fully as he is known.

And may God give us a heart like Christ's: vulnerable to the sorrows of life yet overflowing with love.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor