

Sermon – Matthew 5:1-9
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Grace Lutheran Church
Mike Berg Memorial Service
7 December 2024

Elsa and Sadie, Claire; Bill and Cindy; family and friends; sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. Mike Berg, as we all know, was a cool guy. He made the world bigger for us. I think just about the ways he opened up life for me. The first time I rode in an Uber was with Mike. The first time I put on a virtual reality headset was in his living room. It was Mike who introduced me to the *Star Wars* bad lip-reading video shorts, and goodness knows my life would be poorer without “Seagulls! (Stop it Now!).” But mostly, my life will be poorer now because Mike has been taken from us. All of our lives will be. Mike was warm and funny and smart. So interesting in so many ways, but also so interested in others. He very quietly did a bunch of graphic design work here for us at Grace that I don’t think anyone even knew about. I will miss sitting with Mike over a pint or two at the Beer Shop, conversations in I’d always be learning about a new show to watch or album to check out, yes, but even more, engaging in real conversation and wrestling with life’s issues and challenges. I’m so grateful to Sara and Marcus, to Claire, to Sadie and Elsa, for sharing your memories, your words, with us today. For opening up for us how Mike made the world bigger, better, for you. How can it be that Mike is gone?
2. We are here today because, after 46 years – not nearly enough time – a brief illness took Mike’s life away from him, and him away from us. It is painful and deeply unfair. Claire, you should have so much more time and love with Mike, so much more life to explore together. Cindy and Bill, you are here today doing what no parents should ever have to do, mourning your beloved

- baby boy who grew into a remarkable man. Elsa and Sadie, your dad loved you so much and was so proud of you, and he should still be here with you. It is hard, nearly a month after his death, to wrap our heads and our hearts around his absence.
3. During this season of Advent, we in the church prepare once more for the celebration of Christmas, the coming of Jesus Christ into our world. We hear today from Matthew 5, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus speaks of the brokenness in which we live. Jesus names our reality. We live in a world in which many hunger and thirst for righteousness; a world lacking peace; a world where our spirits suffer; a world in which we mourn; a world in which there is death. Jesus is born into this world precisely because the world is as it should not be. Jesus knows our suffering and our sorrow. As God in our midst, Jesus has taken on our life and our lot. We learn from Jesus that God does not cause our suffering but stands with us in our suffering, even and especially when death comes too soon. As the preacher William Sloane Coffin said, reflecting on the death of his son, Alex, "God's heart was the first of all our hearts to break." Jesus, born for us, is with us in our grief.
 4. But if Jesus is with us in our grief, so, too, does God offer a way forward, not with cheap comfort or pat answers, but with the hope of a new creation won for us in the death and resurrection the Son, Jesus Christ. If Jesus, in the Beatitudes, names for us what is wrong and broken in this world, so, too, does he point to the upending and reversal of this world's old ways. Justice and righteousness will come in their fullness. Comfort will be given, with God's own arms wrapped around us. The kingdom of heaven will come, and we will see God. Death does not get the last word; nothing can undo the fact that we, by the grace and mercy of God, are called children of God. All those years ago, Cindy and Bill, you brought your little boy to the waters of grace at Our Redeemer in La Crosse, and Mike was named and claimed by our God as God's own child. And while we wish, desperately, that Mike were still with us,

still we know that God's promises made that day to Mike have not been undone. Mike is still a child of God, alive now in the very light of God's presence. And you, Elsa and Sadie, were brought by your dad and mom to the font at Grace, where you, too, were named and claimed by God. And so it is that we are all caught up in the same promises, members of the same family, bound together in the love of God that will not let us go but holds us together even in the face of death. For death, in Christ, has been undone, unmasked, made now into the gate to everlasting life. Life, in Christ, wins out. Mike, too soon, has gone on ahead of us. But it is not the end of his story, nor of our shared life together. We, too, will one day be welcomed home, and we will see Mike again. Just so is Mike with us now, part of that great cloud of witnesses whose faith continues to inspire us, whose love continues to cheer you on, Elsa and Sadie.

5. In Christ, we find hope. Hope that, as Paul writes to the Corinthians, continues to abide, along with the gifts of faith and love. Hope that, as Paul writes to the Romans, does not disappoint. Joined to Christ in our suffering, we find the power to endure, to keep going, to become who God is calling us to be. Lives in which we each discover our particular calling to live out the life of faith God desires: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. Hope is an elusive thing, at times, especially in our grief. It can be hard to glimpse. Thankfully, God has given us to one another. We walk this journey together. And together, today, we cry, and we mourn. With broken hearts how could we not? We know that there should be more to Mike's story. But with hope we remember that there *is* more to Mike's story, and that one day we'll be united again in God's presence. In that hope, bound together in faith, and with love for one another, we give thanks to God for Mike's life, here with us and now with God, alive forever in the kingdom in which crying and pain are no more, and death itself is swallowed up in the victory of our God. Thank you, Mike. We'll see you when we get there. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.