

+ *Let Down (Pastor Jeremy Walloch August 1, 2010 + Luke 23:13-21)*

At some point after a death, the inevitable question is “Who gets their stuff?” and the inevitable reaction is letdown. After a life filled with joy and pain, blessing and suffering, the transition for the complexities of a person’s life to the simplicity of their stuff is a letdown. Furthermore, figuring out what happens to a deceased person’s possessions often brings out the worst in people. Frequently, what are actually human beings somehow transform their very body and DNA into that of buzzards. Does anybody know what I’m talking about? “The ugly dispute is all too familiar: haggling over furniture, dishes, silverware, house, land, and savings account left by the deceased. Jesus is asked to be a referee and he refuses: after all, who can judge whose greed is right?” (Fred Craddock)

I’ve only had to be part of that process once, when I was in elementary school and my grandma had died. The family all got together to go through their home and barns. There were interesting moments, like finding a hundred year-old local newspaper. There were exciting moments like firing up my dad’s old ‘70 Chevelle. There was a lasting moment when I was given the fedora my grandpa wore when he was a young man, which I still have hanging up today. But in the end, after good people had lived and died, to be left with a bunch of old stuff to get rid of was quite a letdown.

When did you first realize that there through life and at the end of it there would be some big letdowns? Even back in elementary school I remember three classmates experiencing overpowering letdown: hearing about a classmate on his knees in his yard sobbing “Please don’t go” while his dad got in the car with an armload of clothes and said “I gotta go”, visiting a friend handcuffed to her hospital bed forcing calories into her after she had intentionally thrown up meals for almost a year while staring at airbrushed magazine photos, attending the funeral of my sister’s best friend after a battle with cancer unsuccessfully waged by a kindergartener. Even in elementary school, it was perfectly clear that life was going to have some serious letdowns.

What got me through it wasn’t grandpa’s old hat. It wasn’t even what my parents said and did, though blessedly they did everything right. What got me through it was Jesus. As a child I was taught that anyone could go to Jesus no matter what they were going through, and he would welcome them, and listen to them, and care for them, and love them, even if he didn’t love everything they did. There’s that story that church children hear all the time, (but maybe still not enough), about the disciples not welcoming the children, but Jesus welcomes them, and picks them up in his arms. That image stuck and that Jesus got me through childhood.

Eventually, though, that image got a little harder to lean on. Oddly enough, the more Christian study I did the harder it became to lean on Christ, because it turned out that almost everyone has a very different understand of who Jesus is, and most of the time it simply reflects the person studying Jesus. People who were focused on caring for the poor saw a Jesus that only focused on the poor, and I wasn’t poor. People who were from third world countries saw a Jesus that only focused on people from underdeveloped areas, and I was from the USA. People who seemed to fit in anywhere saw a Jesus that was out in fun public places all the time, and that seemed too easy. People who lived in monasteries saw a Jesus that went away from the crowds for prayer and silence, and that seemed too anti-social. People who liked fancy worship services saw a Jesus that only focused on sacraments and liturgy, and I didn’t understand all that. The more I learned, the more my image of Jesus got larger but also more opaque. Seeming to grab ahold of it was like trying to collect and save a morning’s mist. It wasn’t until I *had to* lean on someone that I was able to really see who it was I was leaning on.

## S E R M O N S

This church went through some challenging times some months ago. We had to decide whether we'd remain in one denomination or go in another direction. It was a hard thing on the congregation; it was a very hard thing on me.

I haven't said much about it recently. Mom told me not to pick at scabs or they don't heal. However, today I'd like to say that I am most grateful to have gone through that time, because it was then that I realized that I would not always be able to simply rely on the comfortable, that I would not always be able to simply rely on the popular, that I would not always be able to simply rely on institutions, but there is one who I would always be able to rely on.

He's what got me through it all. You helped, my family helped, friends helped, other churches helped, but only One really got me through the let downs. His love never fails.

Now I can say that "I have been betrayed by close friends. I've been stabbed in the back. I've been criticized. I've been misunderstood. I've been let down by institutions. I've had people I deeply respect absolutely ruin their lives with destructive choices...I've been let down in profound ways. But Jesus, the Jesus I met in elementary school, the Jesus who has grown and expanded, that Jesus has never let me down. I've been let down by churches, people with power and influence, systems and ideas and movements and trends and fads [and ads and possessions], but Jesus has *never* let me down. He's never let me down. He's never let me down. He's never, never let me down."