

Alex Crawford Funeral (29/09/17)

by the Rev'd Adam Lowe

Bible Passages:

Psalm 91; Isaiah 40:28-31; John 14:1-6; Romans 8:38-39

Alex was an extraordinary man. *A beloved husband, father, friend, colleague, and mentor.*

- **Alex was generous.** Continuously giving selflessly of his time, energy, and resources. Famously writing to people, giving books, sending articles *by post*. He was the driving force behind the Mathew Hale Public Library. *He lovingly and intentionally encouraged people wherever he went.*
- **Alex was humble.** Never seeking the spotlight and always taking the lowest place. He always seemed much more interested in other people than himself. *It's not that he thought of himself as lesser, but simply thought of himself less.*
- **Alex was joyful.** He would be forever telling jokes, and recounting stories. At any moment he would become louder and erupt into tear-filled laughter. *I remember many occasions of the family rolling their eyes, but still brimming from ear-to-ear.*
- **Alex was determined.** Tenacious, yet gentle, in his dogged pursuit of a goal. And he managed to do that, not only in small tasks, but in long-term endeavours. *He had a clarity of mind regarding the purpose of his life and he never gave up.*

I remember one night Alex called me at about 9PM because he had a document that he needed me to sign. I was going to see him for breakfast the next morning, so suggested that perhaps I could just sign it then in order to save him a trip around to our place. He said, sounds great and we finished the call. As I hung up the phone I turned to my wife and said, 'Alex will be here in about 5 minutes'. Sure enough, there was a knock on the door, and Alex was there pen and document in-hand.

Generous, humble, joyful, and determined: You might be tempted to think, that Alex was all of this simply because he was a *nice guy*.

- But Alex wasn't a great man because he was nice,
he was a great man because he knew WHO WAS his Lord.
- The determining factor of Alex's life, that made him who he was, *shaped how he lived*, was that he was utterly convinced and compelled by the Good News of Jesus.
- Alex knew that he was in need of saving, and he trusted in the only one who could.
- Generous *because he was the recipient of God's great generosity through Jesus on the cross;*
Humble *because he knew the cost at which his place was purchased before the throne of God;*
Joyful *because he knew the riches of God's love and grace, and that death was not the end;*
Determined *because he was convinced that nothing was more important than the Gospel.*
- Alex was an extraordinary man, because he had an extraordinary Saviour.

The certainty of Alex being with Jesus brings us great comfort, but it does not negate the enormous hole that is left in our lives.

- With the shock of his death, and the sadness that we feel, we can be left asking, "Why, Lord?" . "Why would you take him away from us now?"
As someone who so filled our lives with love and life?
As someone who was such an effective advocate for the Gospel?

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- There is no easy answer to those questions, but I do know **how** Alex would want us to approach it. Through the Bible.
- *Because what we read is remarkable.*
- First, as we heard in Psalm 91, we are reminded that in our pain, anguish, and grief, that God invites us to run to him.
- And when we run to God, we find someone who is not indifferent or unable to empathise with our pain, but someone who both shares our pain and cares for us.
- It's in God, that we find refuge, *our safe place,*
as the God of the universe, who created all things and will recreate all things,
invites us to dwell with him; resting in the shadow of the Almighty himself.
- It's an incredibly intimate image. The Psalmist further to even likening it to a hen covering its chicks with its wings to protect them, even in the face of peril.
- And so friends, I want to urge you today to not only grieve, and to ask questions, but also take that grief to the Lord and rest in his strength.
- Don't do it on your own. Support one another and run to the Lord.

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And as we do that, as we take refuge in the Lord, our grief is also shaped by **hope**.

- Not a, 'cross-your-fingers' type of hope.
But a hope grounded in the reality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.
That because of Jesus, death is not the end.
- That's a great consolation for us, that whilst we miss Alex so desperately, death does not have the final say, and Alex is feasting with his King right now.
- *I can only begin to imagine the stories and laughter happening around that table!*

That hope is what we heard in the reading from John's Gospel:

That on the night before he died, dining with his friends,

Jesus shared that he was going ahead of them to prepare a place.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?"

- This was stressful news to the disciples, they're troubled by it.
- But note Jesus that Jesus says that the antidote to their troubled hearts is **him**.
Look to me, believe in me, trust in me.
- Why? Because he IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, and the LIFE.

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- Our culture often reduces Jesus to being a lovely guy full of warm fuzzies, but actually this claim - to be the way, the truth, and the life, is audacious.
- This is an absolutely controversial and outrageous claim, as he unambiguously makes himself the object of faith.
- He's saying, the way to intimacy with God, is through me.

Jesus is the WAY.

- When he talks about preparing a place for them, he's talking about heaven.
- He's calling to mind, the great hope, that God is going to remake the world, wiping out sin and death, bringing heaven and earth together, where the people of God can dwell with him.
- But in their anguish, the disciples don't quite get it, and so Thomas inadvertently asks one of the most important questions of all time: *what is the way to God?* Thomas wants directions, and Jesus gives him himself.
- *I am the way.* Even further, *no one comes to the Father except through me.*
- There's no wriggle room to suggest another way. Jesus is it.
- And the reason is because: God is not a concept to be understood or discovered, but a person, *who died for you and me, to be known.* That's why there is only one way.

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- That's why Alex didn't merely marvel at the idea of God, but he revelled in relationship with God.

But Jesus is also the truth.

- *Not a truth, part of the truth, not pointing to the truth, but Jesus says, I am THE TRUTH.*
- Jesus' claims are not that of just a prophet or a wiseman, but to be truth itself.
- How is that possible? Because he's saying, when you look at me, you see the reality of who God is.
- This is truly remarkable - truth isn't unknowable. Truth isn't something for you, and something different for another.
- But as you look at Jesus who wept at the tomb of his friend, Jesus who forgave the sins of others and healed the sick, Jesus who washed his followers feet, Jesus who died on the cross, Jesus who rose again, You see the truth of who God is.
- Which means there is no guessing required.

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And finally, Jesus is the life.

- Jesus' claim is that life begins and ends in him.
- He's not just someone who you consult with, He's not just someone who offers advice on right-living. **He is life.**
- **And he makes that possible through his death.**

Earlier on that night,

Jesus told the disciples that the time is coming for God to be glorified in him.

- But that's going to happen in the most surprising way - through the cross.
- That doesn't seem very glorious, but Jesus is saying, this will look bad, but it's actually good, because it's through my going, through my dying for your sins, that life for all eternity will be opened up to you.
- He does that, not because of anything we've done, not because we've earned it, not because we've been so clever in figuring out the core principles of 'God', *but because he loves us and wants to be in relationship with us for all eternity.*
- And it's all possible by turning to and trusting in Jesus.

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- You don't have to make guesses, you don't have to await a performance review, but you can grasp life beyond the grave, based on the trustworthiness of Jesus.
- *It means that our grief is not one of despair, but grounded in the reality of resurrection.*
- Alex was an intelligent man; a lawyer; so well read and studied. And he had concluded with certainty that Jesus was truly who he said he was. And what Alex knew in part, he now knows in full. //
- If you're here today, and you're not sure of what you think about Jesus, I want to urge to take a closer look.
- *Look at the evidence of who Jesus was: his claims, his life, his death, his resurrection.*
- Because if Jesus' claim - to be the way, the truth, and the life, is true, whether or not we trust in him, is the most important decision we'll ever make.
- Whatever you do, don't leave that question open-ended.
- I know that there's nothing more that Alex would want, than for everyone to embrace the truth of who Jesus is.

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And if you love God, then I want to say:

in our grief: let's run to God as our refuge and our strength;

in our hope: let's be comforted to know that Alex is with his Lord; *and*

in our life: let's be emboldened by Alex's example to proclaim the truth of who Jesus is.

- Twice at Synod last Saturday, in this very room, Alex arose to speak about the Bible in some way.
- *Why? Because he believed that the Bible was not just a book, but the very Word of God, that contains everything that we need to know about salvation.*
- That we might not just know God in general, but that we might know God through his Son.
- That in him we might find a sure and certain hope. A solid ground for faith, and a mighty Saviour worthy of our devotion.

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