

A Service of Death and Resurrection for Troy Michael Goode

The 137th Psalm is one of the most beautiful, yet heartrending passages in the entire Bible. It was written after Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians. The Babylonians swept through the holy city, took captives and resettled them to Babylon. There they were removed from everything that was familiar to them – their homes, their land, their houses of worship and their families. The period known as the Babylonian Exile is one of the darkest times in Jewish history.

While in exile, pockets of Jews gathered trying to make the best of a difficult situation. Their lives were in upheaval. Nothing was the way it used to be. They missed the familiarity of home, they missed their loved ones and they missed the Promised Land, which they called Zion.

So this Psalm begins with a mournful voice, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows we hung our harps. For there our tormentors taunted us by demanding songs saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion...”

And then comes one of the most poignant questions in all of Scripture, “How? How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”

Those of us who love Troy Michael Goode have found ourselves in a strange land these last few days. It isn’t a land called Babylon, it is a land called disbelief or shock or grief or even anger.

And like the ancient Israelites, our hearts cry out with a difficult question, “How do we sing the Lord’s song, how do we hold on to our faith, how do we face another day, in this strange land?”

We start by holding onto memories. “Let my right hand wither, if I forget thee O Jerusalem,” the Psalmist says. We have spent the last few days telling Troy stories. Some have brought a tear to our eye, but many have made us laugh. Troy was so vibrant, Troy was so exuberant, Troy was so full of life that we could stay here for hours and tell stories.

There was his fascination with fireworks and other dangerous projectiles, for instance. I am convinced one of the reasons he enjoyed coming to North Carolina to visit us is because South Carolina sells fireworks legally. He

would never come to see us that he was not rewarded with a bag of fireworks along the way. A few Fourth of Julys ago he had been to visit his Goode grandparents and was back in Naples when they opened the paper one morning and saw in the police report that a mailbox had been blown up with a firecracker. By pure coincidence, I'm sure, the date of the incident wound up coinciding with Troy's visit.

There was the Russell family reunion when he insisted on playing with a hatchet even after several uncles and assorted cousins told him it was dangerous. He eventually slashed his leg with it, cut his jeans open and bled all over the place but that didn't stop his enthusiasm. Nor did he back down on his insistence that he could handle it safely. He just said he could, not that he would!

There was the Russell family reunion with all of his aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents when he stuck a stick in the air conditioning unit outside his cabin. When caught and punished, he was asked what he was thinking of. As I recall he said he just wanted to see what would happen. This explanation would have made more sense had he not done the same exact thing two years earlier at a different reunion in a different place. Maybe he just wanted to be sure that sticks in air conditioning fans had the same effect in Florida that they do in Georgia.

There was the time he and Jonathan sprayed vegetable oil on Jonathan's mother's wood floor so they could slide on it and the time he caught a trash can on fire at a camp at Busch Gardens. When one of his cousins asked him why he did it, his reply was – and I quote – “I didn't think mulch was flammable.”

There was the time camping with his Goode cousins when he and Kyle decided to get on bikes and joust with one another. So they each found a long stick and rode their bikes as fast as they could right at one another. They knocked each other off of the bikes, their sticks broke and they wound up sprawled on the ground. But they learned how to joust.

He had a thing about squirrels and was always plotting to catch them. One camping trip with his Goode cousins he was sitting under a tree trying to catch a squirrel which was sitting right above him. Suddenly it jumped right on top of his head, scratching and clawing – no doubt in an effort to avenge all the brother and sister squirrels Troy had harassed over the years.

We could tell story after story about Troy and all of them help reveal who Troy was: inquisitive by nature, exuberant about life, at times a bit impish, impulsive and mischievous, but never, ever mean. I suspect he got out of more than one scrape at home and at school by simply looking at people with those big brown eyes, arching his eyebrows and smiling that smile that seemed to say, “You can’t really get mad at me can you?” And the answer was, of course not. At least not for very long.

These stories remind us all of the difference Troy made in this world and in our lives. He is now gone, but will never, ever be forgotten. And what can Troy teach us? What would he say if he were here to say it?

I think he would say to all of us: Don’t be afraid to be who you are. Love life. Don’t take a day for granted, not a sunset or a sunrise. Love each other. Be kind to other people. Appreciate nature and God’s creation.

How do we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land? We begin by holding on to our memories.

We also hold on to one another. That’s what family, friends and a community of faith are all about. When you’re too weary to pray, we’ll pray for you. When you’re hurting too badly to sing, we’ll sing your part. When you’re mourning too deeply to affirm your faith, we’ll lift our voices in affirmation for you. When you’re too exhausted to have faith, we’ll have faith for you until you are strong enough to rediscover yours.

Sally and Jimmy, Adrian and Clara, Kyle, Jessica, Emily, Brian and Jessica, to all of Troy’s grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, we are going to surround you with love and with our thoughts and prayers during this sad and difficult time. There are people around the country praying for us this moment and they will continue to pray for us – people we do not know and may never meet this side of heaven are heartbroken with us and they are praying for the healing of our hearts even now. Troy’s death is a reminder to us all of the fragility of life and the basic goodness of people. .

To all of the parents here today: Don’t take your children for granted. Tell them you love them, even when they roll their eyes. Be more patient. Hug them. Listen to them more and talk to them less. Kiss them goodnight, no

matter how old they are. Life is precious. Our children are gifts given to us for a season. Please do not take them for granted.

I know there are a lot of young people here today and so I want to say to you: Please don't take your parents and families for granted. They love you and only want what's best for you. Don't be afraid to tell people you love them. Don't ever be anything but who God meant you to be. Always give your best. Please don't let the shock and sorrow of Troy's death embitter or disillusion you. That would not honor Troy's memory and would not be what he would want.

Even this difficult experience can teach all of us something about life and about this world – that is that the vast majority of people you will meet in this world are good and kind and decent people. People from all walks of life, people from all faiths or no faith, people from all races and nations – most of the people you will encounter in life will be good people trying to do the right thing. Think of all the people who helped Troy and his family during this difficult time, the doctors and nurses and therapists, the people who were praying for him, the football team and band members who honored him, an entire community who grieves his loss.

We remember Troy as a loving son to his mother and father and to his step-father and step-mother, a devoted brother to his beloved older brother Kyle and to his step sisters and step brother, a wonderful grandchild for his grandparents and a fun-loving, exuberant, delightful cousin and friend. Troy was blessed to be loved by three families: the Russells, the Goodes and the Jones's and he was a blessing to us all. If friendships are the measure of one's wealth, Troy was a rich young man indeed.

How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? We hold on to one another.

We also hold on to our faith in God. It is our faith in God and his goodness that will get us through these days, weeks, months and years ahead.

Certainly we have questions, some of which will probably never be answered in this life. Of course we have doubts during a time like this. But in the midst of our grief we hold on to our faith in a merciful, just and kind God.

Remember the words of the Apostle Paul: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body.”

Of course we’re confused. Of course we hurt. Of course we are angry. But we all know Troy Goode would want us to heal and move forward in our lives, not wallow in our sorrow and misery.

We must not allow our lives to be dominated by thoughts of Troy’s death. We must instead allow our lives to be fulfilled and deepened by the appreciation for his life. He was with us too short a time but in our grief let us not forget to be grateful that we ever had him at all. What a gift he was to each of us. We are better people because he walked through our lives and left his footprints on our hearts.

So let’s leave here determined to make a difference for good in someone else’s life. Who knows what Troy would have become? An artist, a missionary, a graphics designer? You can be sure that he would have put his God given gifts to good use. So, to honor him, let us do the same. Let us be the very best we can be with what God has given to us.

And even now we remember that our faith tells us that God will turn our Good Fridays into Easter Sundays. When asked if he feared his enemies who threatened to kill him, the South African Bishop Desmond Tutu replied, “No because to a Christian death is not the end.” This is not the end of Troy’s life. He has begun a new, eternal life where he is free from pain and he can run and laugh and smile that beautiful smile once again.

How do we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land? We hold onto our memories. We hold onto one another. We hold onto our faith in God.

Those of us who love Troy Michael Goode find ourselves in a strange land these days. Yet in our grief and sorrow let us recall those comforting words from the book of Revelation, the 21st chapter. They speak of another land, a land where the tears have been wiped from every eye and there is no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain because have all of

those things have passed away. We have not yet arrived at that land, but Troy has and for that we give thanks to God. Amen.