



# WAITING FOR DEATH, *Waiting for Christ*

by **Michael Schuermann**

*“And just as it is appointed* for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (HEB. 9:27-28).

Waiting with someone who is dying is no picnic. You watch the unevenly-paced surrender of her body to death: one day slow and then the next as if a year’s worth of dying took place overnight. Breathing is increasingly labored. Conversation spirals away from the two-sided variety until finally the burden rests entirely on you. The eyes that at first with recognition gladly welcomed you eventually remain shut almost constantly. The one who is dying in Christ groans with eager longing for the angels to come and carry her to Abraham’s bosom; she longs to finally be home with her Lord for all eternity. Yet sometimes our Lord bids her, “Wait.”

Sitting at the side of one of Christ’s lambs as he dies is at the same time a glorious joy. Whether you are his pastor or another brother or sister in Christ, you abide with him in the hour of his death with a tremendous treasure: Emmanuel – “God with us” – has come! Jesus – “the Lord saves” – has grown in wisdom and stature, has received John’s baptism, has walked the lonely road to Calvary with our sins, has been forsaken, has died, has risen, has ascended!

In this way it seems to me that the waiting of dying is a bit like the waiting for Christ to come again. I’ve counseled many family members that it is a perfectly acceptable prayer to ask Jesus not to delay but quickly to take their loved one from this vale of sorrow to Himself in heaven. In the same way, we hear from the very end of the Scriptures that it is a very good prayer when our Lord’s Christians pray, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus!”

When will the Lord call us home? When will the Lord come again on clouds with great glory? We know neither the day nor the hour. But this is not a frightening thought, for we know so much else! We know that our Lord’s mercy and love demand that He bring us to Himself. We know that our Lord’s crucifixion has declared us to be paid in full in regard to sin’s debt. We know that our Lord’s resurrection stands as a guarantee that death has no more sting and the grave has no more victory. We know that when our last hour comes, or when our Lord returns, that we will always be with the Lord. Thanks be to God!

The saints, who here in patience  
Their cross and suff’rings bore,  
Shall live and reign forever  
When sorrow is no more.  
Around the throne of glory  
The Lamb they shall behold;  
In triumph cast before Him  
Their diadems of gold.

Our hope and expectation,  
O Jesus, now appear;  
Arise, O Sun so longed for,  
O’er this benighted sphere.  
With hearts and hands uplifted,  
We plead, O Lord, to see  
The day of earth’s redemption  
That sets Your people free! (LSB 515:3-4) ☞

.....  
**The Rev. Michael Schuermann** is pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Sherman, Ill