

31At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

32He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' 33In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"

34"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 35Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Chuck Edwards wasn't afraid to die. During our visits together while he was in hospice care, I asked him how he felt about dying and each time he assured me that he had no fears, that he knew where he was going, and that he had a strong faith. He talked about how thankful he was to have lived a wonderful life, but that he was ready "to go." Chuck Edwards wasn't afraid to die because Chuck Edwards knew whose he was and where he was going. And so it was that this past Wednesday afternoon, with his children surrounding his bed and his beloved Doris holding his hand, that Chuck peacefully passed from this world to the next, ready and eager to discover what awaited him there.

In a world where many people wonder and search, seek and doubt, it was amazing to find someone so focused, so confident, so peaceful. Each time I spoke with him—indeed thinking that each time I was speaking with him could be the last time I would speak with him—each time I spoke with Chuck I was inspired, comforted, and, to be perfectly honest with you, a little less afraid of death. When I was with Chuck during his last days, I felt how I believe God wants me to feel—wants all of us to feel—focused on the kingdom of God, confident in the promises of God, and peaceful as only a soul focused on God can be.

And not only do I believe that God wants us to feel focused, confident, and peaceful, but I also believe that this is how each one of us wants to feel as well—and we don't just want to feel it on our deathbeds, or when we're at a funeral, or when we're in the midst of a life crisis, for some reason those moments help us to prioritize and focus on the kingdom of God. But that's not the only time we want that kind of focus, is it? We want that focus, that confidence and that peace—we want them today, and we want them tomorrow, and we want them the next day. We want to be like Jesus who, in spite of Herod's threats, said to the Pharisees, "In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day . . ." We too, want to keep our focus, confidence, and peacefulness in God going today, tomorrow, and the next day. We want to have a focus and confidence and peacefulness in our knowledge of the love of God when we're waiting in traffic and when we're grocery shopping and when the kids are being loud and when the dog is barking and when our kitchen is under construction and when we're preparing for company and when we're doing our taxes and when we're waiting in the blasted and never-ending line of cars of folks waiting to pick their kids up from school at the end of the day, but because we got a last-minute phone call we're running late and so we're going to have to park way out in the parking lot and walk through all that snow and ice to go in and pick up our kid and by the time we get there, to see our son for the first time in 7 hours, we're so cranky and bent out of shape at the thought of walking back through all that snow and ice and this time the wind is going to be at our face and by the time all is said and done not only have we lost focus on the love of God but we're so far gone that we forget to even give our little guy a hug.

It's so easy to find our todays, our tomorrows and our next days so packed full of activities, obligations, work, worries, and such a lot of busyness that we lose focus on the kingdom of God. We're like the little chicks Jesus talks about. "I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

It begs the question of us—are we willing? Are we willing to gather together under the wings of God, to do the ministry of God today, tomorrow, and the next day? Are we willing to pursue the most treasured things of the

Kingdom of God—love, mercy, compassion, and justice, instead of so diligently pursuing the treasures of this world—success, money, a prime parking space outside of the school or whatever other temptations we encounter that would lead us away from being the disciples we are called to be. Are we willing? From what I know about us, yes, we are willing. Are we able? Well now, that’s another matter altogether. For most of us, the way we live our lives today, tomorrow, and the next day is not conducive to generating focus, confidence, and peace in the kingdom of God. We’re simply too busy, too distracted, too willing to bow to temptation. And it’s not just us—it’s everybody. And it’s not just now—it’s been happening since the beginning of time. Adam and Eve were willing, but their flesh was weak. The Israelites were willing, but their flesh was weak. Jesus knew it was true of us when he said, “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”¹ And in so many ways, that’s why he came to save us—he came to save us, not necessarily from some cosmic evil force, but rather, in so many ways, he came to save us from ourselves, he came to give us peace for the living of our days, not just peace in the kingdom that is to come.

Yes, Jesus came and took care of our Salvation, and I’m talking about Salvation with a capital “S” here, because of Jesus “our souls living on with God kind of Salvation” does not rest with us. But there is a kind of salvation that does rest in us, and that’s the salvation that comes from knowing and realizing that the matters of this world while important in this world are not of ultimate importance. It’s the peace God wants for us for the living of our days. And this is what this Lenten season is about—it’s time to consider and reconsider what really matters. Lent invites, from its very beginning when we are reminded that from dust we have come and to dust we shall return, Lent invites us to reassess, reprioritize, and realize that this world is not as good as it gets, and that the goodness of this world is fleeting and unpredictable. Reminding ourselves of this reality—today, tomorrow, and the next day—saves us from the petty worries and concerns of this world and allows us to, like Chuck, live in this world while also staying committed to the kingdom of God.

When I was doing my clinical pastoral care training in a hospital, I learned what it was to die well. Mr. Red taught me. I’ve told you his story before. Mr. Red waited to die until all of his family members arrived at his bedside and then, when they had all said their goodbyes, he raised his arms to heaven, crossed them over his chest, smiled, and breathed his last. Mr. Red knew how to die. And when I talked with his widow, she assured me that Mr. Red had also known how to live. He, like Chuck Edwards, knew that he had come from God and to God he would return, so he had that focus, that confidence, and that peace that passes understanding that comes from living a life focused on, and believing in, the promises of God.

A life with nothing to fear, a life of freedom from fears about the matters of this world, free from the fear of death itself—this is what God wants for us, this is why Jesus longs for us as a hen longs for her chicks. Jesus longs for us to live free enough from the burdens and stresses of this world to pursue the things of the kingdom of God. Jesus wants us to feel free enough to love, even though loving the unlovable brings us ridicule. Jesus wants us to feel free enough to give, even though our giving to others might cause us to go without something that others might expect us to have. Jesus wants us to feel free enough to speak the truth, even when the world doesn’t want to hear it. Jesus wants us, longs for us, to be saved each and every day—not just on our last day—but on all of our days, free from the expectations, stresses, and burdens of this world so that we can begin to live now, as we will live then—lives of freedom, justice, truth, and love. He wants this for us today, and tomorrow, and the next day, and every day after until God’s kingdom come and God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. This is how he lived. This is what he taught us. He didn’t just come to bring us salvation in the next life, but to show us how to be saved every day of this life—how to live as God wants us to live, how to seek the kingdom of God today, tomorrow, and the next day.

Chuck Edwards died well. We all want to die well. But first, we need to live to well, and like Jesus, seek above all things, the kingdom of God. Thanks be to God today, tomorrow, and the next day.
Seek Ye First

¹ Matthew 26:41