

The Healer, Not The Hurt (Vance O'Donnell Funeral)

Hebrews 11:1-4 (KJV) Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it **he being dead yet speaketh**.

- This is the Scripture that immediately came to my mind when I heard that Vance had departed from this life late Friday evening – “**he being dead yet speaketh.**” Alzheimer’s Disease stilled Vance’s body, silenced most of his words, and even suppressed most of his thoughts over the past couple of years – but it couldn’t keep his character from testifying. Who he was in life preaches a sermon even in death. Vance O’Donnell still speaks, and speaks strongly.
- Vance suffered a literal lifetime of physical disability, but enjoyed his God, his family, his work and his church to the fullest. His siblings still remember the fateful day that he was stricken with polio, and we all remember that he never fully recovered despite the best efforts of the doctors. Vance and his crutches were a familiar site in the Pentecostal church in Fredericton when I was just a child.
- What you may not remember is that Vance was the first one in his family to establish a real relationship with God (they called it “making a start” back then). He literally prayed the rest of them into the Pentecostal church, kneeling by his bed every night as his brothers returned home from their night on the town. They were mischievous and fun-loving, but they were also sinners. It was Vance’s testimony that made the difference.
- Vance was disabled, but he refused to use that as an excuse. He operated several service stations in the Fredericton area over the years, and made a decent living for himself as a businessman.
- Vance was disabled, but he refused to be negative. He was always willing to testify of God’s goodness. To be honest, most folks just didn’t expect such a positive, happy outlook coming from a crippled man ... that’s one reason his life spoke volumes to everyone he met.
- Vance was disabled in body, but he wasn’t disabled in spirit. Even when Alzheimer’s Disease began to take its horrible toll, you could still get a reaction when you prayed and sang with him, or when you called him “Brother Vance.”

- We received this email from Helen Kinney, a missionary in Vienna, Austria, a couple of days ago:

“Vance O’Donnell was a very important person in the life of our family. In November 1948 one day my dad was walking on Queen Street in Fredericton under the influence of alcohol. Vance was on the side of the street selling signs. Out of compassion for the crippled man, my father stopped and bought a sign that said, “Jesus Saves.” That sign and Vance’s witness to my father led him to the church in Lawfield where my father gave his life to the Lord. That contact made a great difference in our home and family. We will ever be grateful to the Lord that He used Vance to lead us to the Truth. I just feel like a great tribute is due to him from our family, and especially from my heart. Without Vance I might not even know the Lord today. I always held him in high esteem in my life, and thanked him many times for his influence in bringing us to God.”

- Today, in the midst of our mourning a LOSS, we must remember to celebrate a LIFE. One of the hardest tests of faith in a time like this is to believe that death and loneliness and hurt is not the end, but that one day our loved ones will live again and we will be reunited. It’s hard to have faith when you’re surrounded by black limousines and funeral flowers and caskets. But it is possible to have a faith in God that is as rock-solid as Vance’s faith was. It is possible to trust God’s Word and gain Heaven’s perspective on today’s events.

Mark 5:22-24, 35-36 (NIV) Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” So Jesus went with him ... While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher any more?” **Ignoring what they said**, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

- Don’t you love that line? “**Ignoring what they said.**” The people around Jairus were consumed by the circumstances surrounding the little girl’s death. All they could talk about was the tragedy; all they could focus on was the **HURT**. But Jesus wanted Jairus to focus on the **HEALER**. Why? Because death from the Healer’s perspective is much different than death from the human perspective!

Mark 5:38-39 (NIV) When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? **The child is not dead but asleep.**”

- From Jesus' perspective, the girl was not dead, just asleep. Sleep is not a permanent condition, and to God neither is death! It's just a necessary step in passing from this temporary world to God's eternal world. It's not an end, but a beginning.
- We see death as the ultimate defeat, but God sees death as the ultimate deliverance. **We see death as the ultimate HURT, but God sees death as the ultimate HEALING.**
- The only difference between Jairus' daughter and Vance O'Donnell is the time they got healed and the place they woke up. God chose to heal her near the beginning of her earthly life, but He chose to heal Vance at the beginning of his eternal life. God chose to wake her up one afternoon here on earth, but He chose to wake Vance up this past Saturday morning in Heaven. In her resurrection, Jesus showed us what He CAN do, so we would believe what He DID do for Vance, and what He WILL do for all of us at the end of time!
- That's the Healer's perspective – death is temporary, resurrection is coming, and life is eternal for those who know God! Pity us in our loss, but don't pity Vance. He loved to go to every kind of church meeting there ever was, but this weekend he attended a healing service like you wouldn't believe!

**Somewhere between here and there, there'll be a healing service
The blinded eyes will see, and the deafened ears will hear
And those that couldn't talk will talk, and the cripples will walk
When we have that healing service in the air.**

- This last song could have been Vance's theme song ... and it won't be a long "wait" until all of God's children are together again!

**Wait until you see me made over anew
I'll be walking with Jesus, all Heaven to view
No sickness, no sorrow, no burdens to bear
Wait until you see me with Jesus up there.**