



***<sup>17</sup> I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness  
and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.***



Martin Luther once said, ***“Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world!”*** And Dick Ritter lived a life that illustrated that axiom so well. Dick loved music. From an early age, he worked to develop the musical gifts that God had given to him, and he used them to give glory to God. From his days in the Columbus boychoir to his days on the organ bench, from singing in church choirs to singing solos for weddings, funerals, and almost any other occasion you can imagine, Dick sang and played joy into the hearts of people. One of our members told me that he visited Dick in the hospital just a couple of weeks ago, and while he was there, Dick sang for him! Yes, Dick loved music.

A few years ago, Dick and Jocelyn wrote down some thoughts about the content of their funeral services. Last year, I sat down with them to review those plans. When we came to the Scripture lessons that Dick had chosen, I had to look a couple of them up because they were neither passages that I had memorized nor passages that are typically read for funerals. I remember Dick asking me if I thought they were appropriate. As soon as I read them, I assured him that there could not be more appropriate choices for his funeral.

One of those lessons was our second lesson this morning, where we read, ***“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Ephesians 5:19-20).

And another was this one verse from Psalm 7: ***“I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High”*** (v. 17). You see, Dick didn’t just enjoy singing because he was good at it. He enjoyed singing because he could use his God-given talent to praise God. And the third passage he chose shows just why he was so eager to sing God’s praises. It was one verse right in the middle of the gospel lesson we just heard: ***“Friend, your sins are forgiven”*** (Luke 5:20).

Sin is such an ugly word. Nobody likes it when anyone tells them that what they are doing is wrong. Young children hate being told no and suffering the consequences for their disobedience. In our teens and twenties, there is little that we value more than freedom from anyone else’s rules. And it doesn’t get any better with age, does it? Whether it’s our bosses telling us what to do, doctors given us orders, or adult children who weren’t always willing to take our advice now giving us advice, we don’t like to be told what to do. We don’t like to hear that we are wrong.

Dick was no exception. Those of you who knew him well know that he could be stubborn at times. Even when his bad hearing meant that he didn’t always have the facts straight, it was sometimes hard to convince him that he was wrong. And yet, week after week when he was well, and visit after visit when he couldn’t get to church anymore, I heard him confess that he had sinned in his thoughts, words, and actions. He knew he could not hide his failures from God.

Dick knew that he inherited a sinful nature from his parents that made him an enemy of God. And, of all the things that he passed down to his children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, this was one that he was not proud of. And we don’t have to be related to Dick to have the same problem. We all inherited the same sinful nature from our parents, who inherited it from theirs, all the way back to the first sin that was committed by the first two people on earth thousands of years ago. And it’s that sin in each of our lives that means that, unless Jesus returns first, we all will die one day. None of us is qualified to live forever. God says

that the one who sins will die, and only the one who is righteous, holy, and perfect will live forever.

Dick knew that. He knew that every angry word or selfish thought, every moment of impatience or self-righteous pride, every foolish deed committed in youth and every careless action of old age was offensive to God. For each and every one of those things, and for sins that only Dick and God ever knew he committed, Dick knew he deserved God's punishment.

But again and again, Dick confessed those sins to God. And again and again, he heard God say in his Word, "Friends, your sins are forgiven." You see, there's another side to the story, another movement in the composition that God wrote for our lives. While we are unrighteous sinners, God is perfectly righteous. And his plan for us was to come into our world, to become human just like we are, and to keep every commandment that we have broken, to obey every law that we have disobeyed. But here's where God's story for our lives gets really good! He who did what we could never do endured the death and hell that we deserved in our place. He was put to death on a cross for all of Dick's sins and all of yours and all of mine. And now, when God looks at us, he doesn't see those sins. He sees the righteous life that Jesus lived in our place. His righteousness is our righteousness by faith.

And so Dick said confidently, "***I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness.***" With his heart and his voice and his life, he gave thanks to the Lord who made him righteous by dying in his place. He sang "***praise to the name of the LORD Most High,***" who forgave every failure and removed every spot of sin in Dick's life.

And his songs of thanks and praise have not stopped. When Dick read these words, "***I will give thanks...and will sing praise,***" he wasn't just thinking of the nearly 83 years that he lived in this world. He knew that, because his sins were forgiven, he would live and praise God forever. And when he took his last breath on earth on Thursday evening, his soul joined the souls of Christians from every age and nation around God's throne in heaven, where he is "***sing[ing] praise to the name of the LORD Most High.***"

There's one more important reason that we have for thanking and praising God today. Jesus, who gave his life for our sins, didn't stay dead. God raised him from the dead three days later. And that resurrection is proof that the price for our sins has been paid in full. With that resurrection, God assures us that one day we too will rise from the grave. Dick's body will soon be laid in the ground. But that will only be its temporary resting place. When Jesus, our Savior, returns on the Last Day, Dick's body will be raised to a new and glorified life. And then, with strong lungs and voice, with ears perfectly tuned to the pitch of the angels and all of his fellow saints, and with a heart set free from sin forever, he will continue to "***give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.***"

It's that truth that Dick believed and confessed that God wants to comfort our hearts with today. Because of that truth, even today, as tears leak out of our eyes and hearts are heavy with the thought of missing a husband, father, grandfather, great grandfather, and friend, we can say with Dick, "***I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.***"

Dick is now dressed in the righteousness of his Savior, Jesus, that he was given at his Baptism. He has been set free to thank and praise his Savior forever. The same Savior offered the same payment for our sins too. His righteousness covers us too. His resurrection from the dead means that death is not the end for us either. Trusting in him, we are moved to thank and praise him throughout our lives, and we are confident that, when we take our last breath on earth, our praise has just begun, as we will join Dick in living to praise our God forever in heaven.

Give thanks to the Lord today, because of his righteousness that makes us worthy to live with him eternally. Sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High, who has called Dick home and has blessed him with the eternal life he promises to give to all who trust in him. "***Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!***" (Revelation 7:12)

***I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. Amen.*** (Psalm 118:17)

## Lessons for May 7

### Psalm 32:1-7

- <sup>1</sup> Blessed is he  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.
- <sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man  
whose sin the LORD does not count against him  
and in whose spirit is no deceit.
- <sup>3</sup> When I kept silent,  
my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.
- <sup>4</sup> For day and night  
your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was sapped  
as in the heat of summer. *Selah*
- <sup>5</sup> Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, "I will confess  
my transgressions to the LORD" —  
and you forgave  
the guilt of my sin. *Selah*
- <sup>6</sup> Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you  
while you may be found;  
surely when the mighty waters rise,  
they will not reach him.
- <sup>7</sup> You are my hiding place;  
you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah*

### Ephesians 5:19-20

<sup>19</sup> Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup> always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Luke 5:18-26

<sup>18</sup> Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. <sup>19</sup> When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

<sup>20</sup> When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

<sup>21</sup> The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

<sup>22</sup> Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? <sup>23</sup> Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? <sup>24</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....” He said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” <sup>25</sup> Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. <sup>26</sup> Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.”