

Eulogy – Rehtaeh Parsons  
by the Rev. John K. Morrell, Rector  
St. Mark's Anglican Church - Halifax, Nova Scotia  
Saturday, April 13, 2013

We gather in this place on this day for a service of memory and anticipation. Thirteen days ago we celebrated Easter. But that celebration came at the end of a week of journeying with Jesus from his triumphal arrival in Jerusalem, where the crowd threw palms at his feet and welcomed him as one to overthrow the Roman Government. That excitement and support didn't last long.

As you look around both sides of this church, you will see some pictures with Roman numerals from I-XIV which is our St. Mark's version of the Stations of the Cross. On Good Friday we walked by each station - which began with Jesus' arrest, his trial, his torture, his carrying his own cross and falling down, to the actual act of nailing his feet and hands and raising the cross up for all the world to see. We wept with Mary his mother and Veronica as they stood by as Jesus slowly suffocated and died. Good Friday is the most solemn time in the Christian calendar because it reminds us of the pain and anguish human death can sometimes bring. For Mary, Jesus mother, it is also a time for us to remember how overwhelming it can be for a parent to lose a child.

As you continue to look around this church, you will still see the flowers and decorations which added to our Easter experience - of Jesus Christ's power over human death, by being raised to new life among us.

Today, we remember the life of a loved one and the promises of God made by the words and actions of his Son, Jesus. And we anticipate the fulfillment of those promises in the life of her whom we mourn and in our own lives as well.

Rehtaeh Parsons was a lovely young woman on the threshold of adulthood and maturity. Members of her family and fellow student friends have spoken so eloquently about her life and how much she meant to them. The most important part of our service this morning is to remember Rehtaeh in her early life, to celebrate the love and service she showed to others, and to commend her soul, the spirit that gave life in her earthly body, to the arms of her maker – the eternal God who loves all his children.

As Christians, we believe that following death and coming into the arms of Jesus will give us the healing of all our doubts and infirmities. In this, she will join her grandparents, who went before her.

Another important part of our remembrance and celebration is to help family and friends, and in Rehtaeh's case, a much wider world of strangers and well-wishers, to come to terms with her death – to offer words of comfort through the words of Scripture being read, by the prayers we will soon share and the music and hymns we sing.

Our first reading from Psalm 121 reminds us that in our good times and bad, God is watching over us, as someone we can turn to in times of need, through prayer. The passage from I Corinthians, which is a well-known aria from the last part of Handel's Messiah, reminds us that the sting of death is overcome through the raising from the dead, of our Lord Jesus Christ. Similarly, our Gospel reading from Mark reminds us of

Jesus' last words before his death. It also reminds us of Mary, mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene going to the tomb and finding the body of Jesus has disappeared. And the angel tells them that he has risen from the dead.

So to those who mourn, be comforted that though the earthly body of Rehtaeh is no longer present to see, to touch, to hug or kiss, her spirit still exists for all eternity, in a place where when we die, we will be reunited in spirit in the love and presence of God.

Social media contributed to Rehtaeh's depression and death. However, social media as used by her parents, allowed them to share her story around the world. This morning is not a time of condemnation, or assigning blame, or determining what was done wrong and who is responsible. It is a time of celebration and thanksgiving of her short life among us. Given the world wide attention to the events leading up to this tragedy, it is appropriate to focus on what has happened ... and what might happen tomorrow, the day after, and weeks and years to come.

How can our society provide a safe haven for young girls?

Why do young men feel that young girls are but objects for their sexual fantasies and pleasure?

Why do teenagers avoid seeking help when they are depressed and suicidal?

How can our schools deal with physical, and now, cyber bullying?

These questions raise moral issues for our parents, children and society as a whole.

How can parents help young boys grow-up to become good husbands, partners or fathers?

How can parents help young girls become good wives, partners or mothers?

Does our legal system help us do this? I think not.

Do our schools help our children clarify their social and moral values? I don't think so.

So where do we get the guidance to become the kinds of people God has called us to be?

I have been ordained for over 20 years and have served congregations in Quebec, Vermont, the Middle East and the Caribbean. Many of the questions I have posed this morning, I have seen dealt with in loving and caring congregations of people who experience similar hardships, but find the comfort and way to live their lives better, when they read and hear the word of God, who teaches us to love our neighbour as ourselves - when we find someone hungry to feed them, thirsty to give them drink.

The commandments and dictates are there as guidelines to help us lead better lives, to build better families and communities. But above all, within a Christian community, you can feel the love and forgiveness of God.

So today, though sad because she has left this mortal realm, we give thanks for Rehtaeh's 17 years among us, for the blessings she has given to her family and friends, for the earthly life she had here and for the eternal life she is now experiencing.

AMEN.