

GRAVESIDE SERMON
Memphis Funeral Home and Memorial Gardens
April 15, 2023 at 10:00am

John 14:1-6, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Good morning, friends, family, dear loved ones. We have come here today to lay to rest one of the finest women the world has ever known, Victoria Lynn Thornton. She passed away in Knoxville, TN on April 10, 2023. Thank you for being here. Your attendance speaks encouragement into each of our lives, and attest to your love for Vicki and her family.

Through a long life of 67 years, she knew 50 of them in marriage to one man, my dad, Sam Thornton. With him she bore and raised two children, seeing them off in marriage and fruitful living into the Lord. She lived in two cities, she was a thorough Tennessean. She had three grandchildren experiencing a host of joys that only a few in this world will ever know. Now, mom's life has come to a close. We have come to her final place of rest on this earth, in this life. Though it is a sad time, as Vicki has ended her days, it is good that we are here.

One true statement will guide our brief time together this morning: Gravesites are precious places. Allow me to share four (4) reasons why this is so, each applicable to each of us.

1. They remind us that we all are but dust.

Mom's path is our path. Though we live we will die. Our days too will come to a close. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."

Cemeteries are sobering reminders that we too, like all before us, our lives will come to an end. We are approaching the grave. We will one day meet our Maker. Allow the Lord to remind you this day of your mortality, that the dash between the dates is all you have.

Psalm 103:14, "For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." Dust, decorated dust made in God's image, but dust in the end. The best of men or men at best. We take each day as a gift, each season in stride. Knowing that in Christ, this world is not our home. Dust we may be, but from that dust, we will be raised in victory.

2. They speak to a life long story.

Mom spent the last 23 years in Knoxville, TN. But today we are in Memphis. Why?

On February 9, 1956 she was born in Millington, TN. Raised in south Memphis on Cromwell. Went to Oakhaven High. Met a man who lived on Pearson. Married at Oakville Baptist. Started

life in an apartment on Rains. Brought a little boy home to a house on Normandy. Moved to Bartlett for a stint, added a little girl. Settled in Germantown, raised a family. Mom has roots all across Shelby county. What the Lord does in one's early years carries through their life.

But 23 years away, she's back in Memphis. But not any place, this place. Mom's parents Algie, and Rosemarie are buried some 12 miles west of here in East Memphis. But that's not where we are. And that's OK. Because today tells a story. Today leaves a legacy. Fifty years ago, mom married a Thornton. Sam Thornton, whose parents Hubert and Sybil, and two of his brothers, are buried in this scope of ground just nearby. Mom was born in Memphis and became a Thornton. Laying her to rest in this ground brings those two truths to permanent memory. It's good that we are here. We see her life come full circle.

3. They provide a sacred spot for survivors.

We have all lost a dear loved one. We mourn because we miss her. We long because we loved her. We cry because we cherished her.

And in the good kindness of our Lord, we have her body to lay to rest. Here is a spot that will be known and remembered until this earth is no more. This is sacred ground for our family. Our generations will return here. We will tell of a 20th century lady, who loved her family well, and whose influence lives on. Children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and on, will find solace and comfort at this place. When times are tough when hard seasons come around we will want to return here. We will remember this day. And it is good that we will.

4. They help us read our Bibles with hope.

As Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus' body down from the cross, cared for it, and laid it in a tomb, likewise we have sought to care for Vicki's body as the Lord has given us opportunity. We too are laying her to rest in a tomb, in a grave.

Though Jesus lay dead, cold, calm and still, his Father raised him from the dead after three days. Friday came, but Sunday did as well. As he was raised so will it be for those who are in him. Jesus lived our life and died our death. His resurrection guarantees our own.

Paul wrote to the Romans, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:5)

In John 11:25-26, Jesus said to her [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1)

Mom is at rest. She has died. But as we gather here today, we are people of hope, life, joy and peace. Because we believe that Jesus raises the dead.

In an effort to arrive at some closure today, I'd like to ask anyone who'd want to make a remark of remembrance, even as brief as just a few sentences, to feel free to share with us at this time:

[Open Time for Family Remarks]

Family Remarks:

Mom's funeral was rightly reserved for the remarks of others. At this time however, in a more intimate setting, I'd like to offer my own as if I could speak to her now. Hear the heart of a son.

Neal Thornton

Mom, I could say a lot about you today, but I want to focus on a single thought: You were my cheerleader. Though the Lord has given me many sources of encouragement, you were chief among them all. You were my number one. For that I say "thank you." From my earliest memories, you loved me so deeply, so clearly, so unconditionally. I never doubted where I stood with you. You were proud of me, when I wasn't proud of myself. You made the grace of Christ real to me. You believed in me when I doubted all the more. You saw success even in my failures. When I hurt, you hurt. When I was excited, you were all the more. Mom, you made me want to do my best, work hard, go the distance, press on. You showed me grace. In your eyes, I could not go wrong. There was nothing I could do to make you love me any less. And there was nothing I could do to make you love me anymore. You mom, or the kindness of Christ in my life.

To that I will say, mom I will miss you. I will miss calling you on the phone, when one of if not both of our days were hard. I will miss your support through hard seasons, your wisdom, your advice. It's more clear now than ever, I was truly a momma's boy. Given a mom like you, I was proud to be so.

As you were proud of me, I was proud of you. Time fails me to recount the physical trials of your life. But know this, we saw you. We saw the pain you endured, the setbacks you experienced. We watched you face challenges, and climb mountains no one ever could. In so many ways mom, you were and still are — our hero, a the heroine of this family generation. Thank you for showing us what true endurance looks like. We will draw on the example of your strength the rest of our days.

I love you, mom, I always will. This son misses his momma. Though I live for Christ and not for you, just as you taught me, I will always keep you in the corner of my eye, and on the shelf of my heart. Your example will guide me, your memory will lead me. Because of what Jesus did for us both, I'll see you again real soon.

In the old hymn "Soldiers in Christ in Truth Arrayed," Basil Manly, Jr, penned these words, "we meet to part, but part to meet, when earthly labors are complete."

In the kindness of our Lord, he has allowed our lives to intersect with the life of Victoria Lynn Thornton. We knew her as a sister, a mother, a wife and as a friend. Knowing all the while each

of our days are numbered. Our times, as the Psalmist says, are in the Lord's hand. And so we met her, knowing that we will part one day. That time has come.

But Christians do not grieve as those who have no hope. As we part today, we do so only for a season. Mom is just sleeping, as those in Christ do. And when the Lord wakes us, we will see her again. What a joyous day that will be, to see Vicki, leaving our earthly relationships behind, knowing her now only as our true sister in Christ, redeemed by his blood, to serve him with forever in view. That day is one for which we long to look.

Two Scriptures and then we'll pray.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

Revelation 7:9-10, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Let's pray together to close this time.