

With thanksgiving for the life of
Brandon Charles Lalor
March 12, 1987 + January 27, 2022
(from Isaiah 35, Psalm 85, Romans 8)

What are we supposed to say at a time like this?
Are there any right words?

In normal times, we know if you greet somebody, you say hi, and then say bye when you're leaving. We know if you appreciate somebody, you say thank you, and if you hurt them you apologize.

But here we are with a moment where you didn't get to say goodbye, when the language of working things out and reconciling and being together no longer get to happen.

On top of that, I didn't get to know Brandon, so what am I supposed to say to those of you who did know him and love him?

I guess first I'll say: I'm sorry. I wish I'd gotten to enjoy his wild exuberant spirit like you did.

Right now, I also wish I had answers, explanations, resolutions, something to say that would just make it all go away. Maybe like you, I wish I could say something of why. What happened. How come this is the end. Why we need to be here today. All those thoughts you wish you could still say to him.

Without being able to say much myself, I turn to God's Word. Again, I wish that meant saying something that would just bring him back.

While I count it an enormous benefit to be able to preach resurrection to you, to offer again the promises of God who raises from death to new life, that's obviously no instant fix. It's an enormous promise ahead that holds you and Brandon and all creation, but sometimes eternity can still feel an awfully long way away, when you're hurting now and missing him now and wanting to go back him still being here with you. Those can both be true: that it's an infinite promise, but still isn't enough for right now, certainly not enough for you just to forget or get over the pain and sadness.

Another version of what we can say now is in looking back, holding on to the memories. You can perhaps hear again in your minds Brandon

strumming chords on the guitar, music he could play along with by ear, or simply write on his own. You can probably hear his laugh, his way of finding humor in everything (and maybe that even means there's been some laughter around here today and through these otherwise incredibly sad days, partly because that's how Brandon would have it, and partly because it's—of course—not really possible not to be laughing as you tell stories about him).

You can go on to recollect, each of you in your own way, and so much more as you share with each other, all those funny and surprising stories of what made Brandon so uniquely Brandon, the daredevil adventures of one who could never sit still. The injuries. The fish stories. The scatterbrained one who left you scratching your own head in confusion, but who could accomplish so much when he was focused. All the ideas, dreams, ambition of his entrepreneurial spirit that seemed to embody an attitude of "I can do anything—and I will!" Plenty of tight spots and difficulties you confronted in or with him, but also the ways he didn't hesitate to help you out.

And all those things he could figure out—not limited to salvaged lawnmowers and snowblowers and dishwashers and cars he'd take apart and put back together, or construction work, not just in his mechanical tinkering, but how he seemed to make it through in life and find ways forward and always—or almost always—to seize the moment for happiness and fun.

That's good, and it's beautiful, and I celebrate that Brandon with you. I'm thankful that you carry part of him with you so that you can go forward in life and find joy in his way, at least in part.

But I also have to say that that makes the loss that much harder, doesn't it? The sadness that much deeper, the death maybe even a starker contrast to his life. You may carry part of him, have his life in you, but also part of you has died and will never be the same. And you sure didn't get to choose or want that.

I continue to be struck that Brandon could fix so much, could repair, and probably in ways heal and improve all kinds of things, but there was other

stuff that didn't go that way, and now the permanent brokenness by his absence.

Or maybe it's always a both-and.

So I don't know what to say, and don't know that I'll say it right. But here are some things I'd like to try to say to each of you, and if I miss you, I'm sorry, but I hope you can still hear what you need:

Friends, coworkers, many various relatives gathered here, a Bible verse says "Owe no one anything, except to love one another." Maybe that can serve as a focus for your relationship, give and take, with Brandon, and I encourage you to reflect on all you gained from him.

Siblings—Lydia, Justin, Joey, Anne, and also Kay, Tabatha, and Matt—through fighting to help his life and through the enrichments to your own, you especially knew loving Brandon.

Gerard—you knew it in getting the chance to reconnect, and none too soon.

Grandpa Zane and Granma Jeanette, I know you'll miss the care and closeness and help. And uncle Bruce, also for your care and kindred spirit.

Brody—you may not really know it yet, know even less than the rest of us what this means or what's happening or what comes next. But you may also know more than us, because your wild spirit and your laughter come straight from your dad, and the rest of us can see how you'll carry him forward, even if he won't be around to go fishing with you and the rest of the good times.

And Avid we can only pray into that future.

Donne. Beth—this isn't a conversation that comes around to a Brandon hug, ending with him saying I love you. But even without that, you can go forward. You may set some of the struggle behind you. You can continue to cling to the delights and the laughs, the songs and all that has been repaired.

And even if you do feel cut off and separated from his love in this loss you shouldn't have to endure—for any of you—finally, I go back to the question: What can we say about these things? When it is so much more than we can say, when I don't have the words, and no matter what we say doesn't seem to be right or to make a difference,

then perhaps all we can say is a repeating of the promise God speaks for us—of peace even now, of strength for you and the odd astonishment of overwhelming joy, of a love bigger than anything and entirely unbreakable.

We heard it from our Psalm: Let me hear what the Lord God says, because God speaks peace to the people.

We heard it from Isaiah: Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God, who will come and save you." Happiness and joy will overwhelm you.

We heard it from Paul: won't God also give us everything else? And neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.