

“Our Nation Mourns Again”

Communion Devotion for Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia

By

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February 2, 2003

Our flags are flying at half-staff again. After the Attack on America and the collapse of the twin towers, we were hoping it would be years before we had to lower the flags. We made it seventeen months.

Like many of you, I have been listening to and reading all I can about the explosion of the Space Shuttle Columbia. Needless to say there are far more questions than answers at this time. I watched yesterday as puzzled NASA officials tried to field questions from the media while holding their emotions in check. It was painful to watch.

Once again, some of America’s best and brightest were trying to make sense of the senseless. This was Columbia’s twenty-eight mission in space and perhaps its most successful. It seemed every experiment on the flying lab had gone perfectly and this sixteen-day flight had been almost flawless. Columbia had been in space approximately 23,000 minutes and needed only sixteen more before safely landing on Florida soil. Time ran out, though, for the seven brave men and women on board. In one split second, their careers and lives ended.

I was moved by the comments and quotes of many people yesterday. I was especially touched by President Bush’s words concerning the astronauts, “**They did not make it safely back to earth, but we pray they made it safely home.**” That sentence was filled with the kind of comfort and hope we need at a time like this. Instead of seeing the familiar faces of waiting loved ones at the conclusion of their journey, they touched the face of God. I believe He was smiling but also crying as He hugged each one the same way we wrap our arms of love around a newborn baby that has experienced the greatest shock of his or her brief life. A mother’s immediate desire after giving birth is to reassure her baby that he or she is loved and safe. I think that instinct comes from God, as those seven astronauts now know first hand.

Out of all the things said yesterday, the one I’ve dwelled on the most came from Jerry Linenger, a former astronaut and now a NASA consultant. He said that when you detect a problem on board the shuttle, you realize “**this may be where and how you die.**” He went on to say that after confronting your mortality, you come to the conclusion that it is worth the risk. “The mission you are on is bigger than you are. Its success is even worth your life.” Those are brave words from one committed to a noble cause.

Today, as we remember our fallen comrades, we also honor our Lord who came to earth with a noble purpose, to save mankind. He came to show us who God is, teach us how to live an abundant life, empower us to live up to our potential and take us home to the Father. At some point along his journey, he detected a problem. He confronted his mortality as he saw a cross looming on the horizon and realized “**this may be where and how I die.**” Evidently, he thought the mission was worth that risk and was faithful all the way to the cross.

And so this morning, we gather around this table in his honor and express the most heart-felt gratitude for his sacrifice. We thank God for sending him in spite of the dangers and risks. We thank Jesus for being faithful to his calling and purpose. We thank

God that death did not have the final word in Jesus' life and will not in ours, either. And we thank Him for preparing a place for unsuspecting heroes to go in the blink of an eye and for granting us the courage we need to continue our journeys, fraught with risks and dangers, until we are safely in His arms, too.