

This week has been like no other time I can remember...

- The five days since Drennen's death have been such an emotional roller-coaster: one of the most heartbreaking events imaginable...
- mingled with such an outpouring of love and concern from all of you, and who knows how many other people
- We've been wandering around in a state of shock, but slowly the reality of the loss is settling in
- Those ups and downs are perfectly normal, and they're not going away any time soon
- As we've heard from the other speakers, Drennen was one of a kind, and we're going to miss him terribly

All week people have been asking "Why?"

- They begin with a common-sense question: "How could such a great swimmer drown in four feet of water, with two experienced lifeguards on duty?"
- We hoped the autopsy would explain it: that Drennen had a seizure or a head injury or even a heart attack
- At this point it doesn't look like we'll get an answer to our question
- It was simply an accident—and that's not very satisfying, is it?

There's a deeper question lurking in the back of our minds, though

- We know that the creation of our world was an awesome process
  - whether we look outward to the vast reaches of the universe, with galaxies spreading beyond the farthest horizons
  - or into the amazing construction of our own bodies, with cells that take a hundred forms in shaping our organs
- This stuff did not happen by accident!
- We may not understand how, but we know that only God could have done all this

But at such a heartbreaking time, it's natural to ask "If God is so great, why do terrible things like this happen?"

- I'll tell you right now, it's not because God wants us to suffer
- God is love, and God's kingdom is a place of peace and harmony, of healing and reconciliation
- Every time we say the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven."

- It hasn't happened yet, but it's God's dream that one day heaven will break out on the earth

One of our teenagers recently offered the image of God sitting up in heaven, watching six billion TV sets all at once

- We each have our own program, and somehow God is able to follow every one of the stories
- Do you think God changes the channel when something bad happens?
- What kind of love would that be?
- I think it's just the opposite: when there's an accident God weeps along with the rest of us
- After all, God had a son who suffered and died, and it wasn't just Jesus' mother who cried for him

But when life gets really hard, when the darkness is all around us, how do we know that God is really paying attention?

- The answer is clear in the response to Drennen's death
- Families all over the metro area are following the story—perfect strangers come into the church to see if they can help
- The phones are ringing off the hook with people asking, "What can I do?"
- The fact is that this tragedy is way too big for us to handle
- Left to our own strength and goodness, it would flatten us in a minute
- But as you heard so clearly in the Gospel reading, "God is love."
- The response we've been seeing in the community is partly from us, but it's mostly from God

God has a plan for dealing with the world's problems, but it might seem surprising when you first think about it

- God wants a partnership with us!
- Do you see how easily God could force us to be loving and righteous and faithful?
- But the first two pages of the Bible describe how we were made in the image of God and given the power to make choices
- We often don't get it right, but God is waiting patiently for us to do our part to make this a better world

If you're wondering about this idea of a partnership with God, think of the example of driving a car

- In the next few years a lot of you young people will be getting behind the wheel
- It's obvious that cars are amazing and wonderful things, but they weren't made by God
- We've used the best of our God-given talents to design and build cars, as well as the roads we drive on
- They're comfortable and convenient and lots of fun, and after a while it seems normal to be sitting in a steel box going down the road at sixty miles an hour
- Until an accident happens, that is

When something terrible happens with a car, we start asking questions

- Had the driver been drinking?
- Were they wearing their seat belts?
- If it's a teenager people will ask, Were they texting when it happened?
- Sadly, those things are often true, and not just with young drivers either

But often when bad things happen and people get hurt, it's just an accident

- A patch of ice or a blown tire or a slight mistake in steering can turn a Sunday drive into a permanent nightmare
- God doesn't make those things happen, but God is right there with us if they do
- God weeps with our sorrows, but God also equips us to respond to them
- That's what we call the Holy Spirit: a gift from God to make us better partners in bringing love into the world
- When bad things happen, we have a job to do for God

The other day Drennen's mom told the story of their first parent-teacher conference

- He had just started kindergarten, and the teacher chose her words carefully
- "Drennen is a very spirited boy," she said, "and someday that's going to be a great asset for him. But now I'm just trying to help him focus."

- From the stories we've heard today, and the ones that all of you know, Drennen just got more and more spirited as he grew older
- Best of all, he had an amazing gift for lifting other peoples' spirits
- There's a reason why this church is so packed today
- Drennen touched our hearts at school and in the swim club and at youth group and on the football field and in a dozen other places
- The spirit of God filled him to the brim and rubbed off on all of us

In a few minutes I'm going to have the privilege of singing a song Drennen's great-uncle Kurt wrote long before he was born

- Melissa chose "Pass It On" because of the words of the first verse:  
*"It only takes a spark to get a fire going,  
 And soon all those around can warm up in its glowing..."*
- Doesn't that remind you of Drennen?
- Wherever he went he was setting off sparks, which brought so much warmth and light to all of us
- It's not like he was a perfect angel, but the Spirit helped him to share God's love with people who needed it

In the end, the most important questions don't begin with "Why?"

- I'd like to know what we can learn from this tragedy, and how we can carry on Drennen's legacy
- We've learned this week that no matter how dark the day may be, God is right there with us, weeping with our sorrows and filling us with the Spirit of love
- Right in the midst of heartbreaking pain and loss, the community can rise to new heights of compassion and caring
- Youth and adults, close family members and people who never knew Drennen, have been touched by a life that was too short but never dull

The truth is that every day is a gift, so we'd better live them to the fullest

- God is counting on us to step up to the plate and do our part
- "That's how it is with God's love," Uncle Kurt wrote, "Once you've experienced it...you want to pass it on."
- Drennen O'Melia played his part to the fullest, and now it's our turn
- He brought us together today—let's take him with us wherever we go