**Introduction**

There is a natural way to think about death and our length of days. There was a completely unearned scene in the frothy TV show Billions that I think summarized it perfectly. The main character – the billionaire financial wizard – and his best friend – the comic relief of the drama named Wags - are standing over a grave plot. After a near death experience, Wags initially is on a sheep without a shepherd spiritual quest, which ultimately devolves into the hi-jinks of buying the last open unused grave site on the island of Manhattan. The two are reflecting over passing, talking about legacy, and start counting the years.

30’s and 40’s – “a tragedy”

50’s – “such a shame”

60’s – “too soon”

70’s – “a good run”

80’s – “a life well lived”

90’s – “That’s a hell of a ride”

**Law**

And such reflection is not without biblical warrant. “The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty (Ps. 90:10 ESV).” Or, “teach us LORD to number our days (Ps. 90:12).” And there are the smattering of verses that talk about a long life as a blessing of the LORD. Such as “seeing your children’s children” or the promise attached to the 4th commandment to “live long in the land.”

 By such natural thinking we must count Art as blessed. And there are a great many natural blessings that we all could recount in Art’s life. Three children, 5 grandchildren, loving wife and happy family life. Ski trips and vacations. Not the least of the blessings being what can only be considered a miraculous recovery that granted Art 7 more years to see that grand-kids grow up.

And none of those natural blessings are to be discounted. But all the biblical warrants continue in ways that the world typically clips off. Our 70 or 80 years continues with “yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. (Ps. 90:10 ESV).” Numbering our days is so that “we may get a heart of wisdom (Ps. 90:12 ESV).” And the core of that wisdom is to know that even 90 years is “as the grass of the field” that “we are but dust.”

The natural – the law, by which we all stare at the grave, points us toward the promise. And Art’s life asks us to hear that promise in which he believed and by which he lives.

**Gospel**

It’s from his grand-daughter’s favorite book, but I can think of nobody that it applied to better. Art was always unfailingly kind. And that is a trait that natural people never fail to undervalue.

Kindness usually goes along with gentleness, and it did in Art. In my 27 years of knowing Art I can’t recall a single unkind act. Not even of the casual common kinds. It is common to observe that after a stroke or entering dementia that you just become more of who you are. Your ability to self-censor is decreased, so if you were a mean or a cruel person, it just becomes more so. Art I think became more kind. Tears which were never far away came easier. A gentle acceptance of limitations and changes was nothing short of miraculous. This is not to say that if you knew Art well enough you couldn’t see the occasional hemming and hawing and fidgeting when people were deciding on something that he thought was unwise or took as a bit of an imposition on his kindness. But he always bore it with grace.

And like Rowling’s character says “we never fail to undervalue kindness.” In fact we often take it for weakness. When of course it is the opposite. It is a statement of strength. It is a living of a life that knows these 80 years are just the beginning. A faith that knows that we pass through things temporal to receive the things eternal. And participating with the Holy Spirit in living out of that eternity today.

Because such kindness and gentleness as Art’s are nothing less than the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Paul lists all the natural things, the works of the flesh, warning against them all that such will not inherit the kingdom, and then turns to the fruits of the Spirit.

Art was baptized into Christ as a baby. Brought to the font by faithful parents. He was united with Christ in those waters. The Holy Spirit took up residence. And He stuck. Recite the creed, Art had faith in all of it.

Art knew that he was not just a natural child of God according to creation, but that he had been redeemed by Christ from eternity. And that he would see eternity. And so he lived that life of faith.

Conclusion

It is right to give thanks for blessings that Art received and that we all received through Art. It is good to remember the love. But one thing is needful, to hear the witness. Art’s life was a testimony to what he believed and knew. The man we know is with Christ.

He knows we will see him again. And we can receive one final kindness, one final blessing, in hearing the witness of his life.