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THESE BODIES – Part 3

By Pastor Doug Winne

"Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, 'I have not pleasure in them.'" – Ecclesiastes 12:1 (ESV)

A number of years ago I visited an unnamed older man whom I will here call "Jim." Jim was living at Brethren Village and was, by that point, in great need of care. He had been a school teacher who, in earlier years, had taken great delight in teaching by means of the Socratic method (asking questions). At church, while teaching, he enjoyed few things more than playing the devil's advocate so as to try and make his students THINK. But now, due to a stroke, he was unable to walk and unable to get around without assistance. Life was difficult and he often felt he had little support. And so it was that while visiting him I asked him, "If you could have one thing, what would you like?" It was to that question that Jim said, after a long pause, "A vanilla milkshake!" And so I said, "Then that's what you're going to get!"

I was not allowed to immediately take Jim out to get a milkshake, so I set up a date (as I recall, for the next day) to take Jim away from Brethren Village, in my van, and to the Knight and Day Diner across the street. And so it was that I took Jim to enjoy the ONE thing he so desired: to enjoy a vanilla milkshake. He said at the time that he thought it was the best milkshake he had ever tasted. A day or two later I received a scathing phone call from one of his relatives, verbally chastising me for putting Jim in such peril. My attitude was that the relative was overly controlling, cared little for Jim, and was content robbing Jim of the few pleasures that he might still enjoy in life. When Jim finally died, the family chose to have no viewing, no funeral, and no opportunity for those who knew him to come together and celebrate his life.

We spend so much of our lives doing things: finding a mate, getting married, having children, raising children, buying a house, fixing up the house, getting a good job that can pay for the children, the house and all the things that come with having a family. And then, once the children are all gone and on their own, life begins to finally settle down. But then aches and pains show up. And with that we enter an entirely new chapter of life: the autumn of our existence.

Psalm 92:14 speaks of the righteous who "still bear fruit in old age." That sounds optimistic. But that remains the goal: to be able to attempt things and then to actually do them even when we are old.

But be warned, there is coming a day for each of us when about as much as we might hope for is the taste of a vanilla milkshake. At that time I hope there is someone to get you (or me) that milkshake. And don't be surprised if, at that time, we say, "That is the best milkshake I have ever tasted." For by then, even the most simple of pleasures will likely be our only pleasure.