

AN ELOQUENT PASSING

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die.”

I have no reason to disagree with the author of Ecclesiastes in that regard. I do have some objection to prematurely leaving this grand earth prior to my appointed time. Obviously, I do not know when that appointed time is. What mortal does? I can say, with some confidence, that as long as I am still breathing, the appointed time has not yet arrived. I can also say, with little consternation, that when I find the individual responsible for my premature passing, I shall do my best to be eloquently tactful in letting him know that he was mistaken. I am currently reviewing a list of suspects.

It is most comforting to know that there are so many outside my social circle who would come to the aid of my family should something unexpected occur. I'm probably not the first to experience some of the concern that follows, but I certainly hope that I can spare others the agony by passing these concerns along. They came to my

attention in a variety of ways: postcards, letters, e-mails, phone messages, texts, word of mouth, and so on. There were many more than what I list here, but it gives a good sampling. In each case, I felt it appropriate to further engage with a response.

Pastor Arnie Schmidt

Dear Pastor Schmidtlapp,

It has come to our attention that you may be in need of our services. It is never too early to make final arrangements so those you love can deal with grief at your passing and not have to worry about a host of other final issues. We here at Donner Valley Cemetery and Funeral Home want you to know that we have several sites available that give a wide view of distant mountains while still retaining the peacefulness of the valley. Call one of our representatives today before it's too late. For your convenience, we've enclosed a discount coupon.

Jason Montague

President

P.S.—If you're not already dead, consider passing on the coupon to a friend who might be.

Dear Mr. Montague,

I must refer you to that eminent humorist, Mark Twain, who once said, "The reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

Regretfully, I must decline your generous offer. Should the Lord call me home soon, I am pleased to tell you that I have already made arrangements for this sort of thing with Seth Green at Cedar Crossing Funeral Home.

It is my intent to continue living life in a manner that as Mark Twain also put it, "Let us endeavor to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry."

Pastor Arnold Schmidt

Dear Pastor Schmidtaker,

We offer our condolences on your passing. We believe that, at times like this, the least we can do is

offer VIP treatment for your semi-annual septic tank cleaning. We will also give you priority status if you want the work done before your funeral.

Peace and good sanitation health,
Mike's Septic Tank Service

Dear Mike's Septic Tank Service,

I would like to put our semi-annual septic tank cleaning on hold for now. If we try to do it before my funeral, it could cause an uproar in proper society in Cedar Crossing. If we do it after my funeral, it would probably just be a "wasted" expense, as my wife and children plan on moving to Las Vegas as soon as I am in the ground.

Pastor Arnold Schmidt

Dear family of Pastor Arnold Schwartz,

In times of need, it can be a comfort to know you've got someone ready to take care of the floral needs for your funeral service. We at Linda's

Florist offer our condolences on your loved one's passing, and we stand ready 24 hours a day should you need to make last-minute arrangements. We also offer interest-free financing for 6 months.

Linda

Linda's Florist

Dear Linda,

While we appreciate your concern, we are afraid that at the present time, we do not need any floral service. I will, however, give your card to my husband, Pastor Schwartz, in case he commits some serious social faux pas and requires an expression of remorse or humility.

Mrs. Arnold Schmidt

To the family of the Revrund,

In the event you now find yourself with an extra automobile you no longer need, Cedar Crossing Salvage is now buying used cars in any condition.

We know that at times like this, it's not always at the top of the to-do list, but we just wanted to let you know we are here and can help turn an excess vehicle into cash to help pay for the funeral expenses.

Butch at Cedar Crossing Salvage

Dear Butch,

Thank you very much for your kind offer. When I reach the pearly gates, I'll find out right away if they take my model and year. If they don't, I'll have my wife call you.

Revrund Arnold Schmidt

Dear Arnie,

I am so sorry to hear of your demise. I guess this means you won't be buying lunch on Thursday. Let me know if there's anything I can do to expedite your burial. I'm sure God is waiting for you. We can only hope He doesn't lean toward Catholicism.

So you don't have to worry, I have several potential suitors for your wife, after the prescribed mourning period, of course.

If you find out that we need to change anything we're doing, theology-wise, try to get word to me somehow.

Your friend,

Fred

Dear Fred,

And to think all I am to you is a source for lunch. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I will be buying lunch on Thursday. I plan on choosing the cheapest greasy-spoon diner I can find.

As far as potential suitors for my wife, I have informed Mike's Septic Tank Service, who seem to have the same concerns with my family, that my wife and children will be moving to Las Vegas as soon as I am in the ground.

On a theological note, Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?"

I believe that, as Lutherans, we will have a garden view. Pastor Evans, of First Baptist here in town, believes that they have all the poolside rooms reserved. I hate to say it, but I think the Catholics will have rooms that overlook the parking lot. I haven't had the courage to tell Father Tom, but it is most likely he would disagree with me, anyway. Maybe my procrastination stems from my concern that I don't deny him being enlightened with first-hand knowledge before me.

Your living friend,

Arnie

Of course, I didn't really send any of those responses (except to Fred), but it was very therapeutic writing them. By the time you read this, I will have narrowed the suspect list down to three. I am already plotting out what leverage I might gain in exposing the fiend ... but then this life on earth is really too short, isn't it? I suppose I must forgive and live each day as if it really were my last. At least I'll know where to get flowers and that my septic tank will be clean. I'll know where I can get

rid of my spare car (I'm sure my wife will opt to get rid of the pickup truck). And then, a little later down the line, I can decide if I want to trade my plot for a mountain view.

Pastor Arnold Schmidt