

I'd like to extend my deepest sympathies to Pat, Zack, Nick, and all the members of Bob's family. Bob died a hero. He died on an impulse that he might be able to save someone else. People become volunteer firefighters to protect the safety of others, even at the risk of their own lives. A firefighter has knowledge about safety, courage to act, a heart that genuinely cares for other people – even total strangers, and the volunteer has to summon all of that on a moment's notice. We take these volunteers for granted. We never imagine all the ways they might spring into action to save someone, and all the ways their own lives are at risk. We owe it to them to act safely, prudently and charitably toward one another. Lives are at stake.

It's a shame it sometimes takes a tragedy for us to realize the true character of some people. In recent times, we have heard stories of heroic acts from Iraq to New Orleans. These are ordinary people, called to serve in unusual circumstances. And they stepped up to the challenge.

As followers of Christ, we have a special admiration for those who put themselves in harm's way for the sake of others. Jesus himself did the same thing. He preached hope and forgiveness to a people deprived of property, influence and wealth. He continued to speak, even when authorities threatened him with bodily harm. In the end, he gave his life so that each one of us could have eternal life with him. His sacrifice has had an influence on everyone in this church and everyone in this world.

After the resurrection, two disciples were walking toward Emmaus when a stranger joined them. They talked about the recent events that had changed their lives: the promises of God in the scriptures and the tragic events in Jerusalem that they had witnessed. When the stranger wanted to go on, they pressed him to stay, and only when he took bread, broke it and gave it to them did they recognize him. It was Jesus! He was alive. He had risen from the dead as he had promised.

Certainly, throughout his life, the disciples had a strong indication of who Jesus was. They never would have followed him otherwise. But after his death and resurrection they came to the full realization of who this was in their midst. He was no ordinary man. He was the Word made flesh. And he loved with a love they had never known before.

My brothers and sisters, we can take heart in this, too. We perhaps did not fully realize who Bob Bestgen was, why God made him, and how his life would make us think about our own loves and losses. Only now do we have a better understanding, like those disciples who recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

It will be normal to feel sorrow and anger over the loss of Bob's life. But Jesus comforts us, opens the scriptures to us, and reminds us why he came and how we must live. If Bob's life moves us to live more lovingly and more faithfully to what we believe, his death is not in vain. Let us pray that Christ, who loved Bob from the beginning, will continue to love him without end.