

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

I KNOW MY OWN AND MY OWN KNOW ME  
John 10:14; Lee Ann Backstrom Funeral; March 22, 2025

Lee Ann was a faithful Christian member of her congregation, attending services weekly and worshipping her God while she was still able. Lee Ann made an impression on me when I greeted her in the back of church. She was always dressed up and “put together.” She was never showy or wanted to draw attention to herself, but she showed that being a child of God in God’s house was something she took seriously. (How we dress for church does not determine how good a Christian we are, nor does it contribute anything towards our salvation, but it is a way we show our respect towards God.)

After Lee Ann was no longer able to drive and moved over to Goldfinch Memory Care, she attended the monthly devotional service I led there. I would stop by her room beforehand if she had not gotten to the gathering space by the time I arrived. I wanted to make sure she had not forgotten. She always requested that the staff help her dress up for the service.

The family wanted Lee Ann’s funeral to be a time of celebration and joy for the life God gave her and the way she lived. I think this is very appropriate. She trusted that God would take her to be with Him in His time, and He did just that. Until she died, she remained upbeat and positive about life. She forgot a lot of stuff along the way, but she never forgot to be pleasant with the staff who cared for her; they will miss her greatly. While we are sad and miss having her with us, Lee Ann’s soul is now with God her Savior.

A blessing to rejoice in today is that Lee Ann did not forget her family. That is a gift to you worth celebrating. Some people with dementia don’t remember who their spouses, children, and other family and friends are. Sometimes their personalities change, their behavior becomes quite difficult to deal with, and their loved ones struggle with them long before they die. It can be heartbreaking if you are put into that situation. You have much to rejoice in today.

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Another thing to rejoice over today is that Lee Ann never forgot who her God and Savior was. God called her as His own child when she baptized as an infant. She was confirmed in that faith on Palm Sunday 1947. Through the regular hearing of God's Word and receiving the Lord's Supper of Jesus' body and blood, God the Holy Spirit kept her in the true faith until she received a blessed end of her life on this earth and God took her from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven. There she awaits the resurrection of her body and the life everlasting. Lee Ann never forgot who her God was.

Most importantly, though, God never forgot Lee Ann. In John's Gospel where Jesus teaches about being the Good Shepherd and believers His sheep, He promises, "**I know My own and My own know Me**" (10:14). Faith in God has these two aspects. The first is that we become sheep of the Good Shepherd when He calls us by name in Holy Baptism. The Good Shepherd is there when His sheep are born of God above. He is with them as they grow up in the faith, and with them as He leads them home at their deaths. The first and most important thing is Jesus knows us.

The second is that Jesus' sheep know Him as their Good Shepherd. We recognize His voice in God's Word and follow Him where He leads us through this life. We don't follow the voice of the one we don't know. Jesus our Shepherd leads us by faith in Him to where we need to go. In this time of Lent before Easter, we are reminded that our Shepherd carried a cross and walked to where He suffered and died for our sins.

As we celebrate today over the life God gave Lee Ann, we rejoice that Jesus carried her sins to the cross and forgave her there. She heard and received that forgiveness often in the Absolution after she confessed her sins. She heard forgiveness in Sermons, and she ate and drank forgiveness with Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper. This is the Good Shepherd she knew and loved.

When Lee Ann could no longer come to church, we came to her. Conversations with her became more difficult over time, but when it was time to give her the Lord's Supper, she was back on track. Long-time memories are often the last to go.

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You were blessed that she never forgot you. And you have the memories of being together as a family as you were growing up. Your vacations together packed into the station wagon, your dad driving straight through as your mom managing to keep you in line until you got to grandparents' houses or the camp site. Your parents made good memories for you children. Later, Lee Ann also made good memories with her grandchildren.

She showed her love for you by cooking for and feeding you. Could you children always tell what wild game your dad had shot and brought back for your mom to cook for supper? Being Scandinavian – it didn't seem to bother her that she was stuck among mostly Germans here at St Paul Lutheran – she wanted to pass on that heritage to her grandchildren. Just out of curiosity, how many of you learned the art of making lefsa from her? Good memories!

Not that her life was always fun and easy: becoming a widow much too young, and then losing a son, Daniel. As parents, we plan on our children burying us not us burying them. Lee Ann accepted what God gave her and dealt with her losses the best way she could, not that it's ever easy.

Her faith helped and supported her so she could do this. In our Gospel Reading from John 14, Jesus had been telling His disciples that He would be going away from them, dying and leaving them. He told them not to be troubled or afraid but have peace because He was going to God His Father and would return to them. They should rejoice in this. They would have His peace if they believed this (Jn 14:25-29).

Lee Ann is at peace now with her Lord. She has followed Him in death, and she awaits a resurrection like His. Your mother and grandmother does not want you left with only good memories of her. She wants to see you again in the glories of heaven, and the only way that is going to happen is if you know and believe in the same God and Good Shepherd that said: **“I know My own and My own know Me.”**

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We have a lot to celebrate and rejoice in today. We rejoice in God our Savior who has now taken Lee Ann to Himself. **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice... And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** This was her faith.

Lee Ann also gave a lot of good examples that all of us could follow, the most important being her faith. When you remember her and all the good she did, St. Paul's words in Philippians four might come to mind: **whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in [Lee Ann]—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.** Amen.