

JESUS LIFTED HIGH TO SAVE EILEEN

John 3:14-17; 12:32; Eileen Brockberg Funeral; August 11, 2018

When I came to St. Paul, Fairmont, Eileen had been a widow for just a couple years, after almost 60 years married to Ray. When people spoke about Eileen, I discovered it was often together with Ray, especially when their group of friends from church reminisced about their many trips together to Lutheran Laymen's League conventions, and all the fun they had.

In my mind, the words "fun" and "convention" don't typically go together. But LLL conventions were fun for Eileen and Ray and those with them, but they were more than "fun". They were also inspiring as they heard about how the Good News of Jesus Christ was being shared here in the United States and around the world through Lutheran Hour Ministries. They were uplifting as they heard Lutheran Hour Speakers preach the same Good News of Jesus Christ. And they were joyful in worship.

Whenever we sing the hymn, "Lift High the Cross" at St. Paul Lutheran, as we did as when we entered the church today, those who have attended LLL conventions will remark to me how thrilling it is to attend the worship services there and sing that hymn of God's love for us in Jesus Christ and the mission the Church has to spread that Good News to the whole world.

*Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
Till all the world adore His sacred name. (LSB 837, refrain)*

We heard what Jesus said in the Gospel for today from John three: **as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.** Later in the same Gospel, Jesus, speaking of His glorious death on the cross, said: **And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself** (12:32).

Today we are reminded of Eileen's faith in Jesus. **For God so loved Eileen that He gave His only Son.** Jesus was lifted high upon a cross to suffer and die for her sins, and rise again to declare His victory over sin, and lead her and all those who believe in Him to victory in their resurrections from the dead. God promised this to her in her Baptism into Christ when, as a newborn soldier of the Crucified, her brow, her forehead, was sealed with the sign of the holy cross of Jesus to mark her as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.

The life of the cross is not an easy one. Yet, Jesus says that in His cross He and His Father are glorified; His cross is glorious in that it saves the whole world. But death itself is not glorious, not the death of Jesus and not the deaths we suffer. Death is our enemy, God's Word says, the last enemy to be defeated. Death is the consequence of sin, the apparent victor as it stings us. But this enemy is defeated by Jesus for us, who has taken away its sting by rising from the dead and raising us from the dead, first, spiritually through Baptism and faith in Him, and finally, when He comes on the Last Day to raise us and all the dead and give eternal life to all Christians.

When I first came to St. Paul, Eileen was a vibrant, active member of the Church, and still healthy enough to be cleaning other people's houses. It was hard to watch as the signs of dementia started taking away her life. When I saw her last at the nursing home a couple weeks ago, she was sitting in lunch room by herself, waiting quietly to be taken back to her room. I greeted her and reintroduced myself, and she looked at me with questioning in her eye, maybe even a little fear. She didn't know me, but she still had faith in her Lord Jesus.

Susan shared with me an incident several years ago when Eileen was still home. Eileen admitted that she had driven herself to church one day, even though it was still dark, but there was no one here. That led to the car keys being taken away, one of many losses she experienced, one after another until her last, death on Tuesday. But Susan, as she has reflected on this incident, saw some light in the darkness. As the disease was taking away memory and bringing confusion, the place that Eileen went to in her confusion was church. She was confused, but not about where she needed to be. In faith, she was drawn to Jesus. The disease could not rob her of her faith in her Lord.

We are here today because of Eileen's death. We are here to be reminded of the sure and certain hope she had in Jesus Christ for her life and salvation. Funerals are good and appropriate times to remember. But I'm pretty sure that if we made today about her, she would be greatly disappointed. In her life on this earth her faith was in Jesus, even as she remains in that same faith in heaven with Jesus as she awaits the resurrection on the Last Day.

While she lived, it was with the realization that many in this country and around the world still live without that faith. She understood clearly that her faith in Jesus saved no one. That is why she and Ray brought their children to God to be saved by God through Baptism and faith, and raised them in that faith in the Church.

I have noticed that many people who may seldom if ever go to church, including family members of the deceased, will attend funeral services. This might be the only time they hear the Good News that Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross to suffer and die for them, to forgive their sins, and draw them to Himself in faith and be saved.

*O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
As Thou hast promised, draw us all to Thee. (LSB 837.4)*

I chose to focus on the Entrance Hymn today, "Lift High the Cross," as a way of focusing on God's work of salvation in Jesus in the life and faith of Eileen. What most of you might not know is that her four children each chose one of the hymns, each for a reason. "Lift High the Cross" I have explained. "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" needs no explanation. The Closing Hymn, "Abide With Me," we will remain in church to sing in its entirety so the last stanza won't be missed; you figure it out. Especially in these last few months, Eileen was comforted by Christian hymns playing in her nursing home room. When she breathed her last and God chose to take her to Himself in heaven, "Beautiful Savior" was playing.

*Beautiful Savior, Lord of the nations, Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, Praise, adoration Now and forevermore be Thine!
(LSB 537.4)*

Amen.