

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

JESUS MAKES POSSIBLE THE IMPOSSIBLE

Mt 19:26, Is 66:12-14, 1 Co 15; Susan Hinz Funeral; March 28, 2025

As Susan was taking her last breaths on this earth last week, the hymn, “When Peace, like a River” was playing in her room. The hymn is also known as “It Is Well with My soul.” It is a much-loved hymn, especially by suffering Christians. The first two lines lay side-by-side seemingly opposite things: peace and sorrows.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way;

When sorrows, like sea billows, roll.

Peace in the midst of sorrow seems an impossible juxtaposition; when in the midst of sorrows and strife, it certainly does not feel peaceful to us. Yet, the hymn lays side-by-side a gently flowing peaceful river and a roiling sea with its crashing waves driven by billowing winds. In the midst of sorrow, the suffering Christian in faith sings:

Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,

It is well, it is well with my soul. (LSB 763.1)

This hymn is based on God’s Word in Isaiah 66, our Old Testament Reading today, which began: **For thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river.”** God spoke these words to a people about to be defeated and carried off into captivity. You might notice a similarity to Susan’s situation. The disease and damage to her body was in the process of defeating her; her remains will be carried off to the cemetery a little later this afternoon. She was in the midst of suffering and we are in the midst of sorrow. How can this be described as “peace”?

God goes on to say: **“As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you... and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to His servants, and He shall show His indignation against His enemies.”** God says that, in the midst of our suffering and sorrows, we should rejoice. In the face of the decline and decay of disease, He says we will flourish like the first green grass of springtime. God says that, in His indignation against all that would harm us, His mighty hand will defeat our enemies, which He has made His enemies. That’s why “it is well with” our souls and we have “peace, like a river.”

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I think that all of us would agree that Sue's life was not easy, and that was true not just recently. In the face of difficulties and adversities, she was resilient. She did not turn in on herself but reached out in service to others, showing her faith in God. Alanna described how her friends from growing up and going to school would out of the blue make comments about how much they loved her mom and got back in touch with her even though they were no longer be in the area. It feels good that your friends think your mom is great.

Susan showed her servant heart to her coworkers at 3M as the Secretary-Treasurer of their local union. Secretary-Treasurer is the sort of job that takes time and effort. As Secretary, you not only have to attend the meetings, but give reports, take notes while there, and when they are over you go home and write up the minutes of the meeting in preparation for the next. As Treasurer, you have to keep the financial records and report on that as well. It's the sort of responsibility that requires not only the willingness to work but the respect and trust of your coworkers.

Susan toward the end of her life was not able to do any of that, yet she remained a hopeful person, especially with hope in God. A decoration that she had while still at home which was moved to the care facility with her was an artwork that had on it, "All things are possible with God." This bold statement is found in our Gospel Reading from Matthew 19, where Jesus' disciples asked Him, "**Who then can be saved?**" **But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."** Jesus makes possible what is impossible for us.

Dementia is something impossible for us to overcome, at least at this point. As far I know, there is no known treatment to reverse the disease; there isn't even consensus on why people get these neurological diseases. Receiving such a diagnosis is difficult. The first impulse is to fight it, but how do you fight an enemy that stalks you from the shadows and can't be touched. The temptation when facing impossible odds against us is to give up, despair over life, and accept defeat, which means our deaths.

The enemies that are too strong for us are the very ones that Jesus took on by His life and death and defeated them, as seen by His rising

to life again. **“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”** Three weeks from today is Good Friday when we worship the God who became man and died on the cross. Talk about dealing with the impossible! When God Himself dies, how can there be hope any for us? If even Jesus dies, **“Who then can be saved,”** is our question.

When it looks like our enemies have defeated us and there is no hope, God comforts us. Alanna, I’m sure that there many were times when you were still young and hurting that your mother comforted you. God says to us when we are suffering defeat and facing something impossible: **“As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you.”** Jesus came to suffer on the cross everything evil our enemies would do to us, and defeated them by rising from the dead.

God calls death our enemy, not our friend. For family and friends who have gone through the “long goodbye” of watching a loved one suffer with and finally die with dementia, there is a measure of relief when death finally comes. Caring for someone with dementia is like boxing the wind: you are exhausted by it but never land any meaningful blows against it. When going through this, the devil would like to convince us death becomes our friend.

St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15: **For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies (and our enemies) under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.**

At the death of a Christian loved one we rejoice, not that death has come, but that even death cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. He has accomplished for us what is impossible for us to do. In Christ, **“Death is swallowed up in victory”** Death, our enemy, has lost its sting and power. So we can rejoice today. **“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Susan has life with Christ. Jesus makes possible the impossible. Amen.