

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

HIS ONE AND ONLY

John 3:1-17; Lois Johnson Funeral; November 18, 2023

Just before the Sunday Service I received word that Lois had fallen asleep in death; Her Lord and Savior Jesus had called her home. As the Church Year draws to a close, our focus is on the end of the world and the Final Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In last Sunday's Gospel Reading of the Ten Virgins, five were wise and five were foolish as they were waiting for the Bridegroom's arrival. Jesus is the Bridegroom. All ten fell asleep, but when they were awakened with the call that the Bridegroom's arrival was immanent, only the five who were prepared with oil were able to enter into the wedding feast when He came. The foolish five without oil were locked out.

I have no doubt that Lois, in faith, had oil for her lamp when she fell asleep in Jesus. I am inclined to think that, if Lois had been in charge of those ten virgins, she would have made sure that all of them had oil for their lamps. She, with the many other women who serve on the Altar Guild, had the responsibility of making sure that the oil candles for worship were always topped up and ready to be lit as we gather to meet our Lord Jesus who comes to us each week in Word and the Sacrament of His body and blood. Lois was the type of person who made sure that things got done the right way.

For someone who was very good at making sure, to the extent of her ability and control, that things got done correctly, losing control of her body and not being able to do anything about it was frustrating. Yet, throughout her cancer treatments, Lois and Dave remained fixtures in their spot in church, though I did not realize at the time that it was very much by grit and determination as she fought through the pain until it became unbearable and Lois had to be hospitalized.

She could relate in her suffering to Job in Old Testament. Like Job, both Lois and Dave suffered the emotional pain of losing a child to death. Like Job, Lois' suffering was also physical, with sores that would not heal. Like Job, Lois refused to respond to her pain and suffering by doing, as someone suggested to Job, **“curse God and die”** (2:9). How do Christians respond to the death of loved ones and their own suffering and coming deaths?

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Lois confessed with Job, **“I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God”** (19:25-26). Christians who suffer like Job share in his faith in Jesus as their Redeemer. Jesus, who redeemed Lois from her sins also redeemed her mortal body. One of the many “Favorite Bible verses” that Lois had written down for consideration for use at her funeral will be quoted in the graveside liturgy. **“Our Lord Jesus Christ... will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself,”** our Epistle Reading.

Struck with cancer and the side-effects of its treatment, Lois’ body certainly was an example of a “lowly body.” When given the choice to continue treatments or procedures that could not cure her, she chose to come home and receive hospice care. This does not mean that she gave up. A Christian knows that, because Jesus has suffered our sin in His body, died, and risen, our bodies will be raised to be like His glorious body. What is placed in the ground after we die will be transformed at the resurrection to be like Christ’s: without sin, without sickness and injury, and without death dwelling in it like it is now.

I can’t remember a time since I have known Lois that I saw her without her cross hanging around her neck. When I visited her at home the Thursday before she died, she felt self-conscious about what she was wearing. She was in her jammies and her hair wasn’t right and it bothered her. What I saw her wearing was her cross, the same thing I saw around her neck every Sunday in church, especially at the Communion rail as she received Jesus’ body and blood, and every other time I can remember.

For many other people, wearing a cross is a fashion statement—notice how I’m dressed—but with Lois it was always a confession of faith in Jesus. Her published obituary noted: “Surrounded by loving family, God called her to Himself on Sunday morning, November 12... **For by grace you have been saved through faith.** Ephesians 2:8.” You won’t be surprised when I tell you that Lois wrote that for her obituary, only leaving out her age and the date, which were in God’s hands, not hers. She relied on God’s grace given her Baptism, which she would trust in until called home at her death to be with Him.

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I have copies of other Scriptures in her own handwriting she thought were important, including two from our John 3 Gospel: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God,”** verse 5, to which she added the comment, “At the moment of Baptism you are united to Christ in His death and resurrection, Romans 6.” And also John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

The reference in John 3:16 to Jesus as the Father’s Son has been translated various ways: His only, His only-begotten, His one and only Son. Jesus, true God and true man in one Person, is unique, the one-of-a-kind Son of God the Father with the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity. This made Jesus the only One who could give Himself to die on the cross and rise again to pay for our sins, save us from perishing in eternal death, and raise us to live with Him forever.

Today, especially, we are comforted that God the Father treated Lois as His one and only child. The Father gave His own Son so He could get Lois as His own. God regarded Lois as His one and only. Another way of understanding this is that God in love put Lois before His own Son, sacrificing Jesus to save and make her His own.

Lois was fond of quoting Pastor Krause to me, who confirmed her and officiated at her marriage to Dave. When asked by Pastor Krause how long she and Dave had been dating, and she told him, he told her it was time to get married, and they did. I don’t think people said “No” to Pastor Krause too often. Even though she was still a teenager, it was time for Lois to marry her one and only love.

Lois received a Bible verse at her Confirmation chosen by Pastor Krause, Psalm 27:4. Before closing with that, I think verse one of the psalm is also appropriate, another one of Lois’ own choices: **The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?** In the fearful darkness of pain and death, she had light, salvation, and God’s strength to not fear. And her Confirmation verse: **One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in His temple.** (KJV)

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Lois has received what Pastor Krause said God was promising her. By the sacrifice of God's one and only Son, she was brought as God's own child to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of her life, beholding the beauty of the Lord in His temple. And because her Redeemer lives, even though her skin has been destroyed in death, she will rise in glorious flesh and see God with her own eyes. Amen.