

## YOUR SORROW WILL TURN TO JOY

John 20:20b-22; Ardis Koenecke Funeral; May 20, 2023

Jesus said to His disciples before His death and resurrection: **“You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”**

As Ardis grew older, she, like many others, began to have issues with her memory. Sometimes dementia totally changes personalities as the brain is attacked. Kind, gentle people might become mean and violent. In other situations, memory loss reduces a person’s thoughts and behaviors to just a few basic things while revealing an openness and honesty in that person. He or she no longer has the ability to hide what’s going on underneath; what you see is what you get. Ardis always came across to me like that.

One of the stories Ardis told me often when I would visit her was about when she was young and the preacher would come for a visit. She related how some people she knew would say when the preacher appeared in the distance, “Hide, the preacher’s coming!” This was something she could not understand because she always liked it when the preacher came, especially getting to know her pastor. She noted that pastors are people too. More in days gone by, people saw a large gulf between the pastor and members of the congregation, and “Herr Pastor” was a little scary to people, but never to Ardis. She wasn’t scared of me. This was refreshing and always made it a joy visiting with her.

Every once-in-a-while, when out shopping for groceries, I notice a church member at the far end of the aisle look up, recognize me, and quickly turn around and flee out of sight to another part of the store. Sometimes these are people I have not seen in church for quite a while, so they see me, their pastor, as the “law” accusing them. I’m actually glad they have a guilty conscience for skipping worship, but I wish they would also realize that their pastor is the one God called to pronounce the forgiveness of their sins for Jesus’ sake. It is possible to hide from your pastor, but not God, who knows everything we do, even if we can hide it from others.

This reminds me of another thing Ardis related to me as we used to sit in her living room on the edge of Interlaken Golf Course. There are people out on the course who somehow don't realize that there might be people in those houses able to see and hear them. She would marvel at what people would do, who they were doing it with, and what they would say. Don't worry, she didn't name names and all that has gone to the grave with her.

It was a sad day for me when I said goodbye to Ardis at the nursing home before she moved away to Wisconsin to be closer to family. I was sad because I was sure that this was the last time I would see on this earth my friend and church member before she died. One of the comforting things for Christians is the promise that even death does not separate us permanently because of Jesus' death and resurrection to life.

This thought was behind the Scriptures Lisa and Mark suggested for the Service today. (I did "flesh them out" a bit, adding a few verses to include a little context.) I appreciate when family are able to do that, though it's not necessary and it is often left to me to choose appropriate Scriptures for the Funeral. It is enlightening seeing the portions from God's Word that people find comfort in when they are grieving the death of a loved one. Many people will express sentiments like Lisa and Mark did, saying of their mother, "She is not truly gone... we will see her again... she is in beautiful place and once again reunited with so many of her loved ones" (5/6/23 email from Lisa).

But these sentiments, apart from God's Word in Jesus Christ, are just sentiments, wishful thinking, without a basis in reality. The faith that Ardis confessed throughout her life on this earth was not wishful thinking but based on the solid Rock of Ages "cleft for" her. She died to sin in Holy Baptism and was hidden with Christ, as St. Paul wrote in Colossians 3, "**For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory**" (3:3-4). After Jesus died on the cross, the Roman soldier pierced His side and "water and blood from [His] riven side...flowed" (LSB 761.1). From Jesus' side flowed water that would baptize Ardis, and Christ's blood to drink in the Lord's Supper with His body to eat.

Jesus realized that when His disciples saw Him suffer and die on the cross they would have sorrow, even as we have sorrow when our loved ones die. His promise to them was that their **“sorrow would turn to joy.”** This was not just some sentiment Jesus shared with them to make them feel better in the face of His death on the cross. God was addressing the reality of death in this world because of sin.

Some people are offended when the pastor officiating at a funeral will come right out and say that the deceased was a sinner, and because of that she has died. Some people don't like to be reminded that they are sinners and they are just as surely going to die one day like the person's whose remains we are going to lay to rest soon in a cemetery. Those sorts of people try to hide in their sins from their pastor.

Ardis was a “poor miserable sinner” and was willing to confess that to God in my presence when I visited her and brought her the Lord's Supper. Sometimes she would express guilt for no longer going to church like she always had throughout her life, and I had to remind her that there is a difference between not going to church because you are unable to get yourself there and not going to church as a choice. I would remind her that I was there to hear her confession of sins and bring to her the forgiveness of her sins in Word and the Sacrament of Jesus' body and blood. Ardis wasn't afraid to confess before her pastor that she was a sinner, and she always liked seeing her pastor because he came to visit her with the gifts of Christ.

What Jesus said to His disciple on the night He was betrayed to death, He says to you today, **“So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”** Jesus saw His disciples a few days later after He had risen from the dead. Jesus rose from the dead to promise Ardis – and all who believe in Him – that she would see Him “in a beautiful place and once again [be] reunited with so many of her loved ones,” as Lisa and Mark confessed.

I pray that God keep you in the same faith so that we can all experience that joy of being together forever with Jesus. Amen.