

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

LIVING FOREVER IN GOD'S SAVING GRACE
John 3:1f. & Eph. 2:4f.; Arlys Malo Funeral; February 16, 2024

Arlys was Confirmed on Palm Sunday in 1945 and her Confirmation Verse from Pastor Malkow was John 3:16: **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** On the Sunday after she died, John 3:16 was part of the Gospel Reading in church. The Epistle last Sunday was from Ephesians two, the wonderful **“by grace you have been saved through faith”** (2:8) passage. As we gather here today for her funeral, it is clear to us that these Words of God made a difference in her life, and they comfort us with the promises of eternal life in heaven.

Though funerals give us the opportunity to reflect back on a person's life, when it is the life of a Christian we are reflecting on, our thoughts are drawn forward, especially to what is yet to come. As Arlys grew older and her ability to remember what was going on in the present declined, she reflected on the past more and more. When she was in assisted living at Goldfinch, she attended the service if she was able. I would arrive a little early to set up for Communion and also have time to visit with those who were early for the Service. Arlys loved to talk “church” when there.

Occasionally, she would ask me if I knew the pastors she had growing up, the ones who confirmed her, married her, baptized her children. I would gently remind her that was not quite that old and had not been in the area for that long. These were recent or current in her memory. For as long as I knew Arlys, church was important to her. When I first got to Fairmont, she and Kenneth were regulars in church. I know that they were active in all the congregations they were members. She played the organ and directed choirs. One of the things she was most proud of was being involved in the building of a new church while they were living in Wisconsin.

Something that came through in my conversations with Arlys was that she wanted things done the right way, and she had definite opinions about what “right” was. If something was not quite right for her, you might end up hearing about it, as well as her suggestions for what would make it right. This included church and other aspects of life.

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God has the same concerns. The world we live in is not quite right. In fact, it is very wrong. How God created things to be is very much messed up. The obvious example of that is all of us are gathered here today in church for Arlys' funeral. God did not create us to suffer the effects of disease, sin against God and each other, and die because of our sin. When we look at ourselves and the ways of the world in the mirror of God's law, the commandments, which describe how God wants things to be for us, things are very obviously wrong.

While it is true that we are relieved that the suffering Arlys was going through, especially toward the end of her life, is over, and we are thankful that God has taken her to Himself in heaven, death is no friend to us or anyone. God's Word plainly says that death is our enemy, the last enemy to be destroyed by God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God sent His Son to overcome and defeat sin and death for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The most important thing for us to reflect back on today is the suffering and death that Jesus endured to make things right for Arlys, for us and for all people. This is what John 3:16 is all about. **For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** If God did not love us, then Jesus would have been sent to make things right by condemning us to death and hell for our sin and unbelief. God could have destroyed everything He made that is corrupted by sin, including all of us, and started over. But God loves His fallen creation. **“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.”**

In John three Jesus sets straight a man named Nicodemus, who did not understand how God was making right all that is wrong with this world. Jesus told him that everyone needs to be born of water and the Holy Spirit to enter and see the kingdom of heaven, which God promises us in Holy Baptism. Jesus went on to say that God's kingdom is opened to us by His death on the cross, resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven. Instead of condemning the world and destroying what is lost in sin, God saves eternally through Jesus Christ, His Son. Jesus was given to death on a cross and rose again. Good Friday is two week away, and then we celebrate Easter.

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I went back and checked when Arlys was Confirmed, which was Palm Sunday in 1945, the week before Easter. I also checked when she was born and baptized, which was about this time of year in 1932. Arlys was born Sunday, March 27, and baptized two weeks later on April 10. March 27th was Easter in 1932. Arlys was born on Easter Sunday and baptized the 3rd Sunday of Easter.

Though Arlys was born physically on Easter Sunday, the day Christians celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead, she was born dead in her trespasses and sins, her inheritance from her parents. The proof of that is us gathered here today for her funeral. Two weeks later Arlys was born again of water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism. In Baptism she became a child of her heavenly Father to receive His inheritance. In Baptism she was born again for faith in God with the promise of eternal life and the resurrection from the dead like her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Her sins died with Christ in her Baptism, and she rose with Christ for the forgiveness of her sins. God made things right for her.

But there is something that is still wrong, something still needs to be made right. What's wrong is death, and the only way to make things right is that Arlys needs to rise from the dead and live forever. So, even as we reflect back today on her life—her birth, her Baptism, her Confirmation, her marriage, her children and grandchildren, her congregations and Christian life for as long as she lived—we need to reflect on what is still to come for her. Her body will be laid to rest in the ground a short time from now, not as the end for her, but in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection from the dead.

We are still in the season of Lent and one tradition is to omit speaking or singing "alleluias" in church until Easter comes. An exception to this is at the conclusion of funerals when we commit the remains to rest in the cemetery, waiting for the Day of resurrection. We will go to the cemetery with Christian hope. Because Christ died, was buried, and rose again, even though Arlys has died and will be buried, she has also died to sin with Christ and lived in forgiveness of her sins throughout her life on this earth. She is saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus. Reflecting back on her life, we look forward to that Day when Christ comes in glory and raises her and all the dead and we will live forever in God's saving grace. Amen.