

IN OUR WEAKNESS, GOD COMES WITH MIGHT
Isaiah 40:6-11; Ardis Meyenburg Funeral; June 12, 2020

On Saturday I got the call that Ardis' strength was waning and her life appeared to be close to the end. When I got to her bedside, I wasn't sure that she was still alive and asked the nurse, who took her pulse and said it was weak but still there. I have been at a number of bedsides of those who have died and it sure looked like this would be another one, but I was wrong. Ardis fought back against death and woke up. A similar thing happened again on Sunday evening. I found her awake and did not seem to want to relax and fall asleep. She was fighting with all her remaining strength against the last enemy, death. Eventually, she fell asleep and stopped being restless. I knew the end had to be near for her, but God was not yet ready to take her soul to Himself. So when I got the call early Monday evening that she had died, I was not surprised to hear it.

God's Word in Isaiah 40, our Old Testament Reading today, describes what happened to Ardis. **All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever.**

This Word of God describes both the weakness of our sinful flesh and the strength of God. Our weak flesh is compared to grass and our beauty to flowers. Last week when it was so hot and the wind blew, the grass withered and the flowers faded fast, especially the peonies in my wife's flower garden. I think Ardis felt like a "fading flower" these last several years as she weakened. The independent and strong woman who would not leave the house without making sure that she was "put together" struggled with the changes forced upon her by age and weakness. And in these last weeks and months, when she was in constant pain, it wore her down.

Surely, today we give thanks for the many years of life that God gave Ardis. We give thanks that you were able to have with you these many years your mother, grandmother, and friend. She was thankful for the many gifts that God had given her throughout her life. But, finally, **"the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades."**

“But the Word of God will stand forever.” If this Word refers to our weakness and fading beauty in life, there’s no hope. All we would have to look forward to is declining health and a painful death. But the word of law is not God’s final Word to us. The Word of God that will stand forever is the Word of Christ. And it’s good news for those who wither and fade.

“Behold your God!” Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and His arm rules for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him.

In our weakness, God comes with might to save us. Our mighty God comes to save us weak and dying creatures. He does this in the Son, Jesus Christ. And, yet, God’s Son does not appear all that mighty and strong when He comes. This is because Jesus comes and takes our weakness as His own. Jesus came in the flesh of a Man without sin, and if He had chosen He could have stayed that way and lived forever. But Jesus chose to take our weaknesses into Himself: our sin, our sickness, and even our death. And by taking our weakness in dying, He showed His strength by rising.

Isaiah describes our strong God in Christ as ruling with might, bringing with Him a **reward** and **recompense**. (I have to admit that I wasn’t sure what the word “recompense” meant so I looked it up in the dictionary. It means to repay equally what was owed, as in, “an eye for an eye.”) If we got what we deserved from God, our recompense, we would be in trouble. But Jesus did not come to return evil for our evil, but His good for our evil. Jesus came to pay what we owe by our sin, pay for it by His own life on the cross, and reward us with life eternal.

One of the hardest things for me as a pastor in these days of COVID-19 is being shut out of the hospital and nursing home. They have done a wonderful job around here of keeping the patients and residents safe from the deadly virus, but in order to do that, visitors have been unable to come in. Knowing that some of my members are weak and dying and not being able to see them has been almost unbearable. I can only imagine how difficult it has been for families not being able to see and visit their loved ones in person!

Thank you Karon and Gloria for arranging for me to see Ardis before she died. A couple weeks ago, I was able to visit her and bring her the Lord's Supper. She was weak and barely able to follow along – confess her sins and receive absolution, confess her faith, pray the Lord's Prayer, and received Jesus' body and blood in the Supper – but I was able to bring these gifts of God to her. I was able to be her pastor again in person.

Isaiah describes our mighty Lord and God coming to us with the tenderness of a shepherd caring for His sheep. **He will gather the lambs in His arms; He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.**

This describes Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and His lamb, Ardis. He gathered her into His arms when she was washed clean of her sins in the waters of Holy Baptism and called by name as a child of God. He carried her in His bosom throughout her days on this earth. As a young wife and mother He led her to church with her young ones, where she also taught other little lambs of Jesus in Sunday School. She heard and learned God's Word in the ladies' groups of Charity Club and the LWML, and served with a glad and generous heart. It was my privilege to serve as her pastor.

Now God has called her soul home to heaven where she awaits with all the saints the great and glorious day when her body will be raised from the dead and she will live forever without weakness.

Now Ardis rests in her Good Shepherd's strong arms. Her weakness did not prevent Him from coming in might to save her from her sins, from death, and has taken her to be with Him until He raises her from the dead. We are comforted with that. We give thanks that this Word of God stands forever.

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 12:20-21)