

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

WHAT THEO BELIVED

John 20:19-29; Theo Miller Funeral; September 30, 2023

What did Theo believe?

Theo believed that desserts – pies, bars, brownies, and cookies – needed to be available at all times, whether freshly baked or in the freezer, just in case someone would stop by for a visit. That her sons' friends from high school would call her 50 years later and ask her if she was ready for their visit and have these desserts for them, shows us that having desserts was something that was important to her. Theo believed in dessert and eating desserts.

More importantly, Theo believed that God had brought Mert and her together as husband and wife for as long as they both should live. In life, they were seen as “inseparable” as husband wife. Their marriage was blessed with children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, who will miss her very much. If Mert had lived another month, they would have celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary. Theo believed in marriage.

But most importantly, Theo believed in Jesus as her Lord and Savior. She is one of the blessed ones of whom Jesus said, **“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”** The apostle Thomas refused to believe in Jesus until after he had seen and touched the risen Lord. Theo's faith came from hearing the Word of God in Christ Jesus. She suggested this Gospel text from John 20 for her own funeral, so it is my guess that she saw herself one of those Christians who had not seen the risen Jesus yet was blessed with true faith in Him. Theo believed in Jesus. What about Jesus did she believe?

Our Gospel Reading highlights what true faith in Jesus always includes, as St. Paul summarized in Romans four, **“(Jesus) was delivered up [on the cross] for our trespasses (our sins) and raised for our justification”** (4:25). For Jesus to do this for us He had to become man, which is highlighted by Thomas' demands. **“Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe.”** Jesus had to be true man to suffer and die on the cross in our place.

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And Thomas was correct in demanding that, unless Jesus was actually risen from the dead, there was nothing to believe in. If the Church was supposed to administer the forgiveness of sins, as the apostles were directed to do on that first Easter evening, that could not be based on some dead guy rotting in a tomb somewhere outside of town. Theo believed in her Lord who had died for her sins on the cross and risen from the dead to forgive her sins and declare her righteous with God's own righteousness.

Another thing the Gospel Reading reminds us of is that because Jesus rose from the dead He could be with His disciples. He would later promise them that He would be with them always. On the first two Sundays of Easter Jesus demonstrated that by showing up where the disciples were hiding behind locked doors. **Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."**

Throughout Theo's life, Jesus came and stood where she was, not so she could see His risen body, but be present in His Gospel Word that gave her peace in Him. Jesus came to be with her in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper and gave her His holy body and blood for the forgiveness of her sins, life, and salvation.

Theo and Mert needed to move out of their house in Fairmont to be closer to family and for their care. And even though they could no longer come to church here, they religiously watched the Sunday livestream of our Service. You can't get the Lord's Supper through the internet, but you can hear God's Word. The livestream lessened for them the barriers from their church family that distance had caused. Through the livestream, they were able to worship with us, and Jesus was with them in His Word. Jesus worked to sustain their faith, a faith that Theo kept to her death.

Was anyone surprised that Theo died so soon after Mert? I don't think so. Now God has called her soul to be with Jesus and Mert. Theo believed that when her body died, her soul would go to be with Jesus in heaven. Even though you are sad that death has separated her from you, we are glad that death has not been able to separate her from her Lord.

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While I know that this was Theo's faith in Jesus, that He would take her soul to heaven, I have not been the pastor of her immediate family. I don't know for sure what you believe. What I say to you is that Jesus suffered and died for your trespasses and sins and was raised from the dead to declare you righteous with His own righteousness. Jesus has done everything necessary to give you peace with Him forever. This gift is for all and is received by grace from God through faith. I don't know what you believe about this, but I know that Theo believed that Jesus is for you, and through faith in Him, you can join her and Mert in heaven.

If you came into the church through the main west doors, over the doorway is carved the comforting verse of Matthew 11:28, quoting Jesus: **"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** Theo's soul is now at rest with her Lord. God wants you to have the same rest.

The Gospel text from John 20 notes how Thomas did not believe in Jesus and His resurrection from the dead at first, only after he could see and touch the living Christ. By hearing this good news we come to the true faith as he eventually did. Thomas confessed, **"My Lord and my God!"** Theo believed that, because Jesus lived, she would live also. On the Last Day, Jesus will return in glory and raise all the dead and give eternal life to all believers in Christ in their new and glorious bodies that are like His.

Sometimes, when I ask Christians what their goal in life is, they answer something like, "To go to heaven when I die." That's a good answer as far as it goes, but God has promised us much more: to raise us from the dead so we can live in body and soul forever, like Jesus.

What did Theo believe? She believed in desserts and eating desserts, which we are invited to enjoy downstairs after the Service. Theo believed in marriage and family, and God blessed her with Mert for many years and their family. And, most importantly, Theo believed in Jesus, who came into the world as a man to save her from her sins by dying and rising, ascending into heaven to take her soul to be with Him there when she died, and that He would raise her body from the dead on the Last Day. That's what Theo believed. Lord, keep us in the same faith. Amen.