

## KNOWING THE WAY

John 14:1-6 Jer. 31:31-34; Delores Plumhoff Funeral; October 9, 2018

Since Delores died on Friday I've been thinking about her – like a lot of other people, I'm sure. I only knew her the last twelve years, a lot shorter than most of you. For the first ten years, it was always Delores and Darrel together. That was the pattern of their married life. They raised their children together. They maintained their home together. They went up north to the lake together. They hunted and fished together. And when they couldn't do that anymore due to failing health, they had the apartment together at Ingleside.

When Darrel began his fight with cancer the last couple of years of his life, he talked to me about Delores' failing memory. He had spent of his life loving and caring for her and was concerned for her wellbeing after he would die. At first, I had a hard time believing that she had any serious memory loss – she was very good at hiding it whenever I visited. But as Darrel's strength declined and it was clear that the end was nearing, you could see that Delores struggled sometimes to understand what was happening. His death did not come as a shock to her, but it sure left a big, empty hole in her life.

Since Darrel's death, Delores remained the same person she always was: happy and always peasant to visit with. Her sense of humor was still there; and that twinkle in her eye when she was about to make a funny comment. It was no wonder that she was a popular person at Ingleside, bringing smiles to residents and staff alike. She had the reputation of being a "hoot."

Yet, her dementia was taking a toll on her. She couldn't remember very well when her family visited with her. She started forgetting who her pastor was. She would be confused about where she was. And she would forget that Darrel had died. She would wonder where he was and when he would be coming home. She started forgetting a lot of stuff, but she never forgot Darrel.

One of the other things Delores never forgot was her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. She might struggle sometimes putting it into words, but always liked to hear God's Word and receive Communion.

The Scripture Readings I chose for today highlight what it means to know and remember God and what He does for us in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah lived in the days when God's people were forgetting who God was and were refusing to return to the Lord even though they were experiencing terrible things in their lives. Jeremiah prophesied of a coming day when God would establish a new testament with His people, a day when no one would have to be taught who the Lord was because they would all know the Lord (31:31-34). The new covenant, or testament, that God would establish was in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Lord described the coming of Jesus this way. **“For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”**

How can God, who knows everything, forget anything? Yet, God forgives our wickedness and remembers our sin no more. All our iniquity is taken from us and laid on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, who suffered and died with our sins so we are forgiven. God remembers the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for our sake, but He remembers our sin no more. This is the new testament God establishes with His people in the blood of His Son.

Delores used to struggle with remembering things, but she never forgot her Lord and Savior. So when I would ask her if she would like to receive the Lord's Supper of Jesus' body and blood, she would confess her faith and say, Yes. When I was going through the brief liturgy of the Lord's Supper with her, she might confuse her parts with my parts and speak them along with me, but she joyfully and faithfully received Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of her sins, life and salvation.

Part of God's new covenant in His Son Jesus is that the day is coming when no one will need to be instructed to **‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know [Him], from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.** For Delores, that day has already come since she now sees the Lord in heaven's glory. She doesn't need to be told the Way to her Father in heaven, because she is already there.

In the days immediately before His suffering and death, Jesus comforted and prepared His disciples by telling them that they knew the Way to His Father and their Father in heaven.

Hear again those words of St. John chapter 14: **“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.”** Thomas said to Him, **“Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?”** Jesus said to him, **“I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

One of the things no one could question about Delores was her love for her family. What she wanted for all of you was that you would follow her to be with the Lord forever. This means that you must know and trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior from sin and death. I not sure where any of you are in terms of faith and church membership because you are not members of St. Paul Lutheran. I hope all of you are baptized and active members of faithful Christian churches that proclaim the Truth of Jesus Christ as the only Way to God the Father and the Life everlasting. If you hope to see Delores alive again, that is your only hope.

I knew that it hadn't been very long before her death since I had seen Delores. It was actually a week and day – I checked my calendar. That Thursday less than two weeks ago was a pretty good day for her, all things considered. She remembered who I was. She was in good spirits, and she was right with me as we went through the brief Communion service together.

But one question she had was where Darrel was. When that topic came up I had two options: remind her that Darrel had died, or avoid it by saying Darrel would be coming later. I don't always tell a person confused with dementia that her spouse has been dead for years. Sometimes I don't think they will be able to understand it at all, and it will cause unnecessary and confusing pain and suffering. But I chose to tell Delores that Darrel had died, even with the full understanding that it would be hard for her. It would be news for her like she had heard it the first time and the loss would hurt, even as the dementia would make it hard for her to process it. Death was separating her again from the man she loved for all those years.

Death separates us from our loved ones. Death separated Darrel from Delores. Death has separated both of them from you. But St. Paul in Romans ten reminds us that **death cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus**. God has overcome death and won the victory over it in Jesus Christ, who died and rose to give us life everlasting.

We don't see that victory today, but we trust that God has kept His promise to Delores that even though she has died, she will live forever. She has joined all the believers who followed Jesus in this life as the Way, the Truth, and the Life to live forever with their Father in heaven, until that Day Jesus returns to raise their bodies to live forever physically.

May the Lord Jesus keep us in that faith and comfort us when death separates us from our loved ones. Amen.