

THE CHRISTIAN FUNERAL OF DEBRA KAUFMANN

Isaiah 12:1-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 2:25-38

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word.”

I’ve chosen for our lessons today three of the lessons I’d shared with Deb recently when I was up to visit her at different times. At the time, obviously, I was fully expecting to see her again among us in a much different way, smiling as she shook the greeter’s hands, joining her voice with ours in prayer and song. To be honest, to be preaching this sermon at this moment for this occasion: that wasn’t even on my radar. My plans, however, and your plans, you who loved her, are not God’s plans. And not only are His different than ours, but in the end, although we might not understand how now, they are infinitely better, and they are always good and wise.

I am going to guess what you’re thinking, though. How can this possibly be better than another day with my wife, with my mother, with my daughter, than another kiss, or hug, or conversation? I’ll be honest. I don’t know. God knows, and I’ve been called to preach and teach by Him, but I am not Him. His mind is too great for my tiny head. I do know this, though. St. Paul is not joking when he writes to the Philippians in our second lesson, as I shared with Deb before her surgery, ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** With that confidence of faith, let us consider the Word of our Lord today, especially the Holy Gospel.

In our Holy Gospel we meet an old man. His name is Simeon. What did Simeon do with his days? Simeon waited. What did he wait for? The Lord. You see, ***“it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.”*** So Simeon, who had been given a promise of God, patiently waited for its fulfillment. I’m sure it wasn’t the most exciting thing in the world, waiting, but, for him to enjoy God’s promise he had to be patient for its fulfillment. And so, as I might have mentioned, he waited.

And then one day, everything changed:

He came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

Do those words sound familiar, Len? I’m sure they do. You heard your wife sing them more than once. You heard her sing them many times. ***“Let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word,”*** after she’d received the very Body and Blood of her Lord who died for her to live forever. That song was a prayer, as it is for each of us who sing it, and the Lord on Christmas Eve answered it. Was that when we expected it? I hardly think so. I’m sure that Simeon didn’t expect the day He met the Christ Child to be the day until the Spirit led him to the Christ Child. But that was Simeon’s day, nonetheless, and He met the Lord. His prayer was answered.

Christmas Eve, as we waited for the birth of Immanuel, God with us, Deb went to be with God, her prayer answered, her peace complete, the Lord’s Word to her kept, fulfilled. Was it when, how we would have planned it? Once again, no, but thanks be to God, it was when, how He planned it, and we can be sure that for that reason, and for that reason alone, it was what was best, for Deb and for us, if for no other reason than that we might learn Paul’s words and their meaning all the more deeply, ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”***

As some of you may know, we've been working on a pictorial directory for our parish. I was finishing up the final touches on it the other day, when I noticed this picture Ruth Belisle had taken of our greeters, and, even with all that had transpired, couldn't help but smile. It is the picture printed in your worship folder. That was Deb. That was Deb as I knew her. That was Deb, happy to be in the house of the Lord, rejoicing to be in the Lord's presence in Word and Sacrament. That was Deb, one who had ***"the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding"*** that I so often bid her and all those gathered after my sermons. Remember that Deb, and learn of her. Learn what it is to be ready to meet your Lord, whether He calls you on a day you expect or on one you don't. Learn what it is to wait, not putting off the things of God, but ready on account of them, because you have taken His Word to heart, have partaken of His Sacrament, have committed your cause to Him in prayer.

Before our Lord took Deb into His arms as Simeon once took our Lord into His own, with joy and according to God's Word, I shared these words with our departed sister, who now sleeps in Christ, whose face we long to see again in the resurrection. They are words from Isaiah, from our first lesson. May they be our prayer:

***Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid;
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation.***

As I shared those words with Deb, I could see in her face, after so many hospital visits, after so many bouts with diabetes, she had through tested and trial come to a certainty that they were true. Len, Melanie, her family and her friends, hear them again:

***Behold, God is my salvation;
I will trust, and will not be afraid;
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation.***

It's hard to lose a loved one at Christmas time. But what better time to be with Christ? As we prepare for Christ to come to us, to be born flesh and blood to save us who are flesh and blood, to be with Him, flesh and blood, like those shepherds keeping watch who made their way to the manger, to hear the *Gloria* sung, not by those gathered here at Christ Lutheran, but by the angels themselves, what sheer joy—Deb's joy. Even as we mourn our loss, let us be happy for her, that the Lord would grant her such a moment. So cry your tears. How can we not weep when we lose a loved one? Jesus wept at Lazarus tomb. But as you do, keep Deb's blessed joy and St. Paul's words in mind:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.