

“The Funeral of our Dear Sister in Christ, Karen Blanton”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Jenny... Dolores, Margie, and Tom. Dear family and friends of Karen: Peace to you and Grace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May our Lord of all blessings give you comfort during these difficult times.

In our Gospel reading we see another funeral. Lazarus had been dead four days by the time Jesus and His disciples come to him. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead so that His disciples, including the apostles, disciples like Martha, *and you*, will believe that Jesus is the Messiah come from God and that He has the power over life and death.

Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die (Jn. 11:25-26).”

This is what Karen believed. I visited Karen several times in the hospital. Our Gospel reading today is the last reading I read with her, in fact. Karen loved to hear the Scriptures read to her. I just found out today that Karen loved to fish. In my many visits with her, I never found this out because she hungered and thirsted for the Words of God. The Words of Jesus. She confessed Jesus as the Messiah who comes from God to remove all her sin so that she will live eternally and not die.

Death has come, and we are sad. We are sad because we will miss Karen. We will all struggle living our lives without her.

But, we also struggle because death has invaded our lives.

Martin Luther, a man who saw much more death than me, expressed it like this: “The summons of death comes to us all, and no one can die for another. Every one must fight his own battle with death by himself, alone (AE 51.70).”

Death came into the world through the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God had created a perfect world and finished this perfect world with the crown of His creation: man and woman created after His own likeness made for relationship with God.

But, Adam and Eve rebelled and wanted to be their own god. Ever since then, we are born in Adam's image and are corrupted by inherited sin. We prove it in a thousand ways by sinning against both God and our neighbor. Therefore, all of us must face death.

You do not face death without hope!

God, Your Creator, sent His Son into the world. "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him (Jn. 3:16-17)."

God Himself came down and joined His creation. Imagine that! God *Himself* joined His creation. The imperishable Himself put on the perishable so that you who are perishable might put on the imperishable. The Immortal Himself puts on mortality so that you who are mortal might live everlasting lives.

Because Jesus put on flesh, He knows what you're going through right now. He was beset by all the frailness of our flesh and by every temptation imaginable. Right after our gospel reading today, you get perhaps one of the more famous verses of Scripture, "Jesus wept (Jn. 11:35)." Jesus was weeping with compassion because he cared about Lazarus and about all the family and friends were weeping over losing Lazarus. Jesus is full of compassion. He weeps with you today in your sorrow. He loves you and cares for you.

This compassion drove Jesus to the cross so that He paid for all your sin. There's not any sin that you've done that isn't covered by the blood of Jesus. In our Epistle reading today, Paul asks,

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law...

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:55-57)."

Jesus offers you victory today by faith alone.

It must be by faith alone.

You cannot pay God back for even one sin. Imagine if you stole from your best friend. It might be possible to repay him the money, but would you ever gain his trust back? Would things ever be the same between you? How much more difficult it is with God, your creator. You can't even earn His trust, let alone, pay Him back.

Jesus lived the perfect life in your place. Jesus paid the ultimate price for your sin.

Jesus offers you the forgiveness of sins in many ways. One is proclamation. If you believe the proclaimed Word that Jesus paid for your sins and covers you with His righteousness, Jesus says that you have eternal life. Just as a beggar receives a handout without any work on his part, you receive grace without any work on your part!

Another way Jesus offers you forgiveness is in Holy Baptism. Earlier in the book of John, a certain religious leader by the name of Nicodemus came to Jesus to be taught. Jesus says one must be born of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5). This is baptism. In Mark, Jesus says it like this, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved and whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mk 16:16)." Hear how Paul puts it, "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may have a new life (Rom. 6:4)."

Yet even another way Jesus offers you forgiveness of sins is in the Lord's Supper. We eat and drink the Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins as it says in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And Paul adds in 1 Corinthians that we proclaim Christ's death in the Lord's Supper until He comes again in glory. This is because through the death of Jesus, you have life!

Why does Jesus give you so many ways to receive forgiveness?

Amazing grace upon grace?

Your comfort!

Christ created the church so that you might find comfort. When you struggle with sin or sorrow, come to church and receive God's Good News of forgiveness again. It doesn't have to be this church. Just go!

Today we mourn for Karen. We mourn the fact that she has passed through death. The Psalmist reminds us, that "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning." The morning here refers to the resurrection of Christ. He is why we have joy in the morning.

Karen is present before her Lord Jesus right now. She has heard those sweet words, "Well done, good and faithful servant (Matt. 25:21)." Paul tells us that to be absent from the body is to be present with Christ (2 Cor. 5:8).

We know this because Christ is resurrected from the dead. Now, Jesus lived in the time of what we call antiquity. The most well attested to fact in antiquity is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ promised to die for our sins and promised to be risen again.

And He keeps His promises.

And because Christ keeps His promises, you know that Karen will be given her imperishable body on the last day when your Lord comes again. If you believe in Christ, you will also receive your imperishable body. We will all join together in a wonderful reunion of those who have gone before us and those who go after us.

Christ will wipe every tear from your eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Christ makes everything new (Rev. 21:4-5).

Today we mourn because we have lost a dear mother, sister, aunt, and friend. Today we also look to Karen's Lord and savior Jesus Christ for comfort.

May our resurrected Lord Jesus Christ give you comfort and peace.

In Jesus' name. Amen.