

The Holy Memorial of Jan Mansell
Psalm 23; John 10:11-16

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

Dear Gary and Sandy. Dear Michael and Patty. Dear extended family and close friends of Jan. Grace to you and peace from Christ the Lord in whose arms Jan now rests. We are sad today because we've lost a dear Mom, grandmother, great-grandmother, aunt, and dear friend. Jan's laugh could light up a room and we will miss her. She has faced the thing we must all face. She faced death, though, with courage. "She has fought the good fight, She has finished the race, she has kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7) Even though we mourn, we can have deep joy in the courage Jan showed in her struggle against death.

We must all face it. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin in the Garden of Eden, man has struggled against sin, death, and the devil. We inherit the sinful condition from our first parents and practice sinning our entire lives. The devil and the world cheer us on in the pursuit of our own evil desires. We become prisoners of our own design. We do what we know is not right and cry out against the rightful consequences of our sin. God's righteous judgment against sin is death. But God does not forsake us. He doesn't leave us to our fate. He makes it possible for us to have life in the midst of death.

King David, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote Psalm 23. It's one of the most beloved Psalms and for good reason. It also relates to our Gospel reading today from John 10. As you mourn Jan, I would recommend that you meditate upon both Psalm 23 and John 10. We only read a small portion of John 10 today, but the whole chapter is worth your careful reflection. There are copies of John out in the narthex, or lobby, and on the chair here by the exit if you would like one. These wonderful words from God teach us how He has helped us in our fight against sin and death. Psalm 23 starts out with these familiar words:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

God says that He is your shepherd. The word for the LORD in this verse is YahWeh which is God's personal name. God acts as a Shepherd in a very personal way. A shepherd cares for his sheep and protects them. He makes sure they have enough to eat and to drink. He protects them from the wolf and the bear even to the point of endangering his own life. Jesus has this passage in mind when He says this:

“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)

Jesus identifies Himself as the Shepherd of Psalm 23. He identifies Himself as YahWeh. He is saying that He is God. And the religious people of Jesus' day understood exactly what He was saying and wanted to kill Him! But later in John 10, Jesus says that “No one takes [my life] from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (v. 18) Jesus laid down His life on account of our sin.

God doesn't turn a blind eye to sin. God doesn't pat you on the head like dumb sheep and say, “It's okay!” God takes on human flesh and sacrifices Himself for your sin. He pays the price that we owe God for our sin. Sin requires a blood sacrifice. If that sounds ugly, it's because sin is ugly and demands an ugly price. Jesus proves that He is the Good Shepherd by laying down His life for you. He proves that He is God by rising from the dead again. He also shows by His resurrection that the debt you owe God for your sin is paid for. In full. God didn't turn a blind eye to sin but met it head on and defeated the effects of sin on the cross. Let us continue with Psalm 23.

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Jesus restores your soul with the cleansing waters of Holy Baptism. He combines water with His Word and applies it to sinners and makes them His sheep. Hear what the Apostle Paul says to Titus, “When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4-7) Paul is saying that Jesus saves you in Holy Baptism by washing you clean of all your sins and making you heirs of eternal life. This is a free gift. You cannot earn it. Jesus gives you this precious gift by grace alone through faith alone.

He also leads you in paths of righteousness not only for your good but for His name’s sake. He’s doing the leading. He does it with His Word. The Bible is God’s means of communicating His grace to you. When the Word of God goes out, the Holy Spirit creates living faith when and where He wills.

Jan is baptized. Jesus washed her clean from all her sin. Jan loved the Bible and her pastors. She listened to the voice of the Good Shepherd. And she exhibited a living hope in the saving work of God in her life. And She loved to tell other people about it! She frequently confessed her faith to anyone whether they wanted to listen or not. I wonder how many people Jan is meeting now in heaven who were encouraged by her witness and her laugh. The Christian life is one filled with joy. And Jan exhibited that joy and brought joy to many sitting here today. The next verse in Psalm 23 describe Jan well:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Jan was comforted by the presence of her Savior through Word and Sacrament. Jesus gave His Word and His Supper so that we know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that He is with us. Jan received the Lord’s Supper regularly and only a few weeks before her death.

That should give you comfort. Jesus says that He gives you forgiveness of sins in His Supper along with His very Body and Blood which strengthens your faith. You do walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Our sin not only puts our lives in peril, but has ruined the world as well so that it resembles the shadow of death. The Lord's Supper touches you personally and you know that Jesus is with you and you don't need to fear any evil. God is for you and not against you. God is indeed your Good Shepherd. This is what allowed Jan to face her death so courageously! The Psalm concludes with these verses:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

God vindicates your life! He says in the book of Revelation that He will right every wrong and dry every tear. (Revelation 21:4). In the fourteenth chapter of John, Jesus, your Good Shepherd, tells you that He goes to prepare a place for you in the eternal house of the LORD. (vv. 1-4) Jesus created the church as a way for you to prepare to live in the eternal dwelling. The church is like a sheepfold. You are sheltered and comforted by God's Holy Word and you're nourished by the Lord's Supper.

Jan loved Grace Lutheran Church. She was so disappointed when she couldn't come in person. At church, we have a particular order of things which we call the liturgy which includes hearing the Word of God and receiving the Lord's Supper. I do the same liturgy when I visit shut-ins. I'll never forget one of my first visits with Jan. We went through the liturgy together which she knew well from her time in church. When I was doing a devotion on the Gospel reading, she stopped me and said, "Pastor, this is just like church!" Yes! You get it! You understand! I'll never forget her precious words even when I'm the one being visited by my pastor.

We will miss Jan. She has had a great impact on all our lives. Thanks be to God she is present with the Lord awaiting the bodily resurrection. She is experiencing nothing but pure joy right now! We will have times of joy and times of sorrow as we remember Jan. I encourage you to lean on your church when this happens. If you don't have a church, I encourage you to find a church where you can hear the Word of God and receive instruction and the Lord's Supper which are the only things that can provide lasting comfort.

Now may the God of all comfort, our Good Shepherd, give you peace and comfort during this time of tribulation.

In Jesus name. Amen.