

The Holy Memorial of JoAnn Miller

Luke 24:36-49

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

We are here because of the death of our dear mother, friend and sister in Christ, JoAnn Miller. We are here to remember JoAnn, and more importantly, we are here to remember JoAnn's life in Christ. Apart from Christ, death is tragic. Death is the one thing we must all face. The Bible teaches us all that we have an appointment with death. (Hebrews 9:27) It is inevitable. JoAnn appeared to make this appointment several times, but God blessed us by keeping her around for a little while. He blessed us even more by taking her to San Antonio Regional hospital instead of her usual hospital so that we could say goodbye to her in person. What a blessing that was. Today reminds us, though, that we must all face our appointment with death. And we dare not face it alone.

We are sad today because we miss JoAnn, but we are also joyful. We are full of deep joy because JoAnn won the victory and died in Christ. She is at peace! We mourn, but not as those who have no hope.

I did not know JoAnn as well as many of you. But I did enjoy my limited time with her and came to love her dearly. Whether it was a playful jab at something I'd said or flowers for my wife, she had a huge impact on me. And I know she had a huge impact on you as well. However little I really knew JoAnn, there are some things I can tell you about JoAnn.

First, JoAnn loved her family. Due to JoAnn's health, I had many visits with her in her home. She always told me about her family whether it was Roger or her kids or her extended family.

I feel like I didn't know JoAnn as well because I didn't get to meet Roger. At least, not yet, anyway. Like I said, we all have an appointment with death. Now Roger and JoAnn complimented and completed each other to the point that you rarely heard of one without hearing about the other. Our Hymn of the Day, "For All the Saints," is in honor of JoAnn, who is now sainted, and all the saints that have gone before her including, and especially, Roger. They are now reunited as they await the resurrection of their bodies when our Lord Jesus comes again to restore all things that are broken and scarred because of our sin.

JoAnn told me about Roger many times, but she told me much more about her kids. Every once in a while she would show motherly concern as only a mother can, but more often than not, she bragged about her kids. Every one of you. She was sure proud of you and who you are and what you were doing. She bragged about you a lot. You kids know how hard she worked to get her accounting degree, but she was more impressed by what you have done and who you've become than her own accomplishments. I believe I can safely say that she considered you kids her greatest accomplishment in this life. And I know I can safely say that she wants you reunited with her as she is reunited with Roger.

And there is only one way for all of us to be reunited with JoAnn and that is through Jesus Christ. We just heard an account of our Lord's visit to His apostles after His resurrection from the dead. The first thing that Jesus says is "Peace to you." (Luke 24:36)

The work that Jesus did in His perfect life, willing sacrifice, and vindicated resurrection atoned for the sin of the whole world and brings peace between God and man. God delivers this wonderful work He accomplished on your behalf to you in Baptism. God makes you His child through water and His Word. You aren't meant to just be family to your natural family that God gives you, but also the wonderful family God makes through Holy Baptism. God's children are born "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man or woman, but of God" through the means "of water and the Spirit" in Baptism. (John 1:13, 3:5, Acts 2:38) We far too often mar our natural families with our sin or too often they are marred because of the sin of another. But the family you are brought into through Baptism cannot be marred because God becomes our Father and Jesus becomes our Big Brother.

First JoAnn loved her natural family. Second, JoAnn loved Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church which was her family by water, if you will.

She loved Grace first and foremost because it was Lutheran. Roger and JoAnn both were unapologetically Lutheran. So what does it mean to be Lutheran? There are many ways to answer that question and I could drone on for far too long on the subject. I think the simplest way to answer that question is that Lutheranism gets the Gospel, capital 'G,' right. And on this Gospel hinges everything, life, death, and everything in between and after.

St. John clearly pronounces the Gospel in his testament:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the

world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:16-18)

I made a point of saying, “Gospel,” capital ‘G,’ because the capital ‘G’ Gospel contains both Law and Gospel. The Law condemns us and shows us how we have fallen short of God’s perfect standard. The Gospel forgives us and shows us how Jesus kept God’s perfect standard in our place and sacrificed Himself to pay for our sins because we cannot. In a nutshell, when you die and face your Creator, you will either hear “Peace to you” or “Depart from Me, you cursed, into eternal fire prepared for the devil and His angels.” (Matthew 25:41) There are no other options. But as St. John so clearly and simply lays out, the only difference is belief in Jesus.

But this is not a mere historical knowledge of Jesus. It is the knowledge that Jesus’s perfect life, death, and resurrection is “for you.” That is, you have received the forgiveness of sins found in Holy Baptism, the Holy Absolution of confession and absolution, and the very Body and Blood our Lord Jesus distributes in His Holy Supper. This is the faith of Roger and JoAnn. They want you to have this faith. I want you to have this faith.

JoAnn also loved the people of Grace. We here at Grace takes seriously our churches’ Scripture verse from Ephesians:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” (2:8)

The members of Grace live as a people saved by grace alone through faith alone for the sake of Christ alone. You constantly amaze me with how loving and kind and generous you are. I know JoAnn loved this about you.

JoAnn loved her natural family and she loved her water family here at Grace. Third, JoAnn loved Jesus. She loved Jesus because Jesus first loved her. Jesus loves you as well. This is why He died for you. This is why He continues to proclaim “repentance for the forgiveness of sins” to all nations through His church. (Luke 24:47) “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. Behold, today is the day of Salvation.” (Hebrews 3:7-8; 2 Corinthians 6:2)

Today, we give great thanks to God for JoAnn. We thank God that He made her a part of our life; whether great or small. I know JoAnn was a blessing to all of us. We also give thanks that God has saved JoAnn and given her the crown of eternal life! She is reunited with Roger, thanks be to God. We also give thanks that God has saved us.

Let us remember the saints who have gone before us and who are waiting for us in that great host in heaven. Even more, let us remember our Lord Jesus who died for us so that we might have life in His name, now and forevermore.