

The Holy Funeral of Judy Adams  
John 10:11-16

Dear Larry... dear family and friends...

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

Judy, Larry's dear wife and our dear friend has died in the Lord. She is no longer with us. But she has won the victory in Christ. She has received her crown of glory. She is with the Lord. Her suffering is at an end. She is at rest and she is happy because she is with her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Judy's death reminds us that death can come at any time. Judy went in for a routine surgery that went well. Yet the Lord chose, in His perfect timing, to take Judy home for Himself. This is great for Judy but immensely sad for us who are left behind. Especially for you, Larry. But we will all miss Judy. But let us not lose sight of the fact that all of us must face death. And we don't choose the place and time for death. Sure, sometimes you have an idea that death is near, but you really have no control over when and how you die. You just know that death will come.

Death is the result of sin. Through one man, Adam, sin entered into the world. Adam and the rest of creation were not created in sin nor for sin. To some of you, it may seem that Christianity is just a bunch of rules you have to follow. And if you follow them, you get rewarded and if you don't follow them, you get punished. And you probably think that's unfair. Well, it's worse than you think.

Adam and Eve were created perfectly in a perfect world. Everything worked as it should. The Ten Commandments of God are not arbitrary rules that God made up but is actually the way things are supposed to work. That's how He made you to work. And when it works like it's supposed to, things work out beautifully. Yet, if you spend anytime looking around you realize things aren't working like they're supposed to. And, if you look honestly in the mirror, you realize you're not working like you're supposed to. Adam fell into sin and doomed the rest of us to be born in sin. We take after our forefather Adam. The worse than you think part is this: you cannot help but sin! If the reward of heaven is only given to those who earn it by their behavior, then all of us are doomed!

One of the most popular images of God and His people is shepherd and sheep. And it's popular for a very good reason. Sheep cannot fend for themselves. They rely upon a shepherd to care for them and protect them. You and I cannot fend for ourselves. We weren't made to fend for ourselves. One of the big lies out there is that we can be independent. Any time you fall for this lie, visit a nursing home. Seriously, walk through a nursing home and look; really look at the people; people who are slowly dying lonely and afraid. God didn't make us to be this way. He didn't make us for death. Yet, that's what we're destined for unless the Good Shepherd intervenes.

Jesus says, "I AM the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." (John 10:11) Jesus is being very literal here. He actually lays down His life for you. For your sin you deserve eternal damnation. You have rebelled against your creator and have sinned in thought, word, and deed your whole life. You deserve the wrath of God the Father who created you and gave you life. Jesus allows Himself to be crucified in your place. He takes on the full wrath of God the Father in your place. The prophet Isaiah pictures the cross:

Yet it pleased the Lord to crush Him;  
He has put Him to grief.  
When You make His soul an offering for sin,  
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,  
And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.  
He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.  
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,  
For He shall bear their iniquities.

On the crucifix, you see the love of God. You see God the Father pouring out His wrath over your sin upon His Son. This is a well-deserved wrath. All of you have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) But God doesn't pour out His wrath on you. He pours it out on Jesus instead. God the Father is pleased to pour out His wrath on Jesus because He loves you. You are His creation. You are special to Him. The justice of God is satisfied in the work of Jesus on the cross and God can offer you salvation as a free gift of grace.

God can do this because Jesus offers Himself in your place to face the full wrath of God the Father. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. Jesus also says, “No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 10:18) No one forced Jesus to lay down His life for you. He laid down His life because He loves you. And because He loves you, He died for you. He died for Judy. And He died for you.

But He also lives for you. Our epistle reading says, “For as by a man came death, by a Man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in His own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end.” (1 Corinthians 15:21-24a) We celebrate Jesus Christ rising from the dead every Easter. And even more, we celebrate Jesus’ resurrection every Sunday. And for good reason. Because Jesus is risen from the dead, all who believe in Him will be raised from the dead. Jesus gives you this incredible gift of resurrection freely. You cannot earn it or buy it. This incredible gift comes to you in baptism.

St. Paul says, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-4) This is why St. Peter clearly says, “Baptism now saves you!” (1 Peter 3:21) Judy was baptized and believed in Jesus. She has the new life with Christ right now. If you are baptized and believe, you have that new life right now. You don’t need to fear your impending death.

To the believer who is baptized, like Judy was, death no longer has the final say. It is merely a doorway to eternal life. The funeral pall you see over Judy’s casket is meant to remind you of your baptism. It’s her final witness to the hope she had in Christ. I met with Judy the Tuesday before she died. She confessed her sins, heard the absolution, and was given both the Word of God from the Bible and the visible word of His Body and Blood in the Lord’s Supper. She expressed her fear over the surgery. But even more she expressed her trust in her Shepherd Jesus. She is now with her Good Shepherd and has no more fear. I can confidently say that Judy

wants you to be baptized and believe in Jesus. She wants to be reunited with you in heaven where all the saints will be together forevermore.

Every time I do a funeral, I meditate long and hard on the dear saint who died. Typically, a Bible verse or story or image comes to mind. With Judy, what keeps coming to mind is Matthew 18:3: [Jesus says:] “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” The thing I remember about Judy is her child-like faith.

Please notice that I did NOT say childish, but rather “child-like.” Our faith in Jesus is always meant to grow from being childish. But, at the same time, our faith is always meant to be child-like.

Typically, children don’t worry about tomorrow. They usually live totally in the moment. They don’t worry about what they’re going to eat. They know their parents will provide food for them. Children unself-consciously depend on their parents. Usually, children are really good about making friends. They don’t treat anyone any differently unless they’re warped by their parents. This is how you’re supposed to be in Christ.

Jesus says, “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:34)

Jesus also says, “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26) I can unequivocally tell you, you are valuable to God. God the Father has created you and God the Son has redeemed you. It doesn’t matter if you’re a believer or not... Jesus died for you... God the Father created you and God the Son has redeemed you! You are precious to Him. And when you repent and believe in the Gospel, God doesn’t hold anything back from you, but even gives you His Holy Spirit!

Jesus says, “I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one Shepherd.” (John 10:15c-16)

Jesus also says, “I know My own, and My own know Me.” (John 10:14)

You get to know the Good Shepherd by going to His sheepfold which is the church. Think about how you get to know someone’s voice. You get to know it by hearing it again and again. Church is the place where you hear, or are supposed to hear, the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd. When you are mourning dear Judy’s death, go to church. But go to a church that proclaims the Bible as the true, inerrant Word of God. Here you will hear the voice of Judy’s Shepherd and your Shepherd. Here is really the only place you can find comfort in the midst of suffering and death. Here is the only place where Christ cares for His sheep and feeds them.

Ponder again the words of our opening hymn. I know it’s difficult to sing, but I chose it because it makes me think of Judy. Her childlike faith and love of Jesus were always evident when you spoke to her. Listen to these incredible words.

Lord, Thee I love with all my heart;  
I pray Thee, ne'er from me depart,  
With tender mercy cheer me.  
Earth has no pleasure I would share,  
Yea, heav'n itself were void and bare  
If Thou, Lord, wert not near me.  
And should my heart for sorrow break,  
My trust in Thee can nothing shake.  
Thou art the portion I have sought;  
Thy precious blood my soul has bought.  
Lord Jesus Christ, My God and Lord, my God and Lord,  
Forsake me not! I trust Thy Word.

Yea, Lord, 'twas Thy rich bounty gave  
My body, soul, and all I have  
In this poor life of labor.  
Lord, grant that I in ev'ry place  
May glorify Thy lavish grace  
And help and serve my neighbor.

Let no false doctrine me beguile;  
Let Satan not my soul defile.  
Give strength and patience unto me  
To bear my cross and follow Thee.  
Lord Jesus Christ, My God and Lord, my God and Lord,  
In death Thy comfort still afford.

Lord, let at last Thine angels come,  
To Abram's bosom bear me home,  
That I may die unfearing;  
And in its narrow chamber keep  
My body safe in peaceful sleep  
Until Thy reappearing.  
And then from death awaken me,  
That these mine eyes with joy may see,  
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,  
My Savior and my fount of grace.  
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,  
And I will praise Thee without end.

Judy is with her Lord. She is at rest. We will miss her and grieve because we love her. But we will look forward with a living hope to the day when we are reunited with her. And we will be reunited with her because Jesus is our Good Shepherd. As the prophet Isaiah confessed:

“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, that He might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”  
(Isaiah 25:9)