

The Christian Funeral of Betty Tepfer Saturday, November 29, 2014 - 11:00am
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church - Danube, MN (WELS)
Pastor Mike Kuschel

Isaiah 25:6-9. On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. ⁹ In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”

“Give Thanks and Celebrate His Salvation”

Today we come before the Lord to be comforted in our sorrow. And the Lord reminds us that even on such a day of sadness there is reason to give thanks. We were blessed to have Betty as a part of our life. We give thanks that God brought her to faith and in baptism God covered her and clothed her with the righteousness of Jesus. We give thanks that she was kept faithful to the end in Christ Jesus. With hearts filled with both joy and sadness we give thanks that Betty fell asleep in peace and she now enjoys the eternal celebration of heaven.

What a blessing she was! Betty was fun to be around. She enjoyed life and it showed. She loved to spend time with family and friends and throw her head back and laugh. Betty was known to have a good time, but she was also known to bark a few orders and she wasn't afraid to speak her mind. With a sly grin and tightening of those sharp eyes she wasn't afraid to call it like it was.

This scripture lesson from Isaiah 25 has that same sort of energy and attitude. Our reading begins with an atmosphere, a spirit, and attitude of celebration and joy. A feast is described, on the mountain of the LORD, ***“The Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines.”*** Isaiah's words paint the picture of a most joyous occasion, but then Isaiah's words tighten as he details how this veil of death that threatens our joy will be destroyed. God has shown him the coming reality of heaven and therefore Isaiah is not afraid to tell it like it is. Isaiah recognizes the weighty threat of death, but goes on to confidently picture what the coming reality will be for God's holy people. Death, which so negatively affects and hangs over all of us, will one day be completely defeated. God will rip it up and throw it away like a worn out sheet. One day the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; will be torn down never to be put up again. Death will be swallowed up in victory! The eternal light of Christ will swallow up and obliterate this darkness forever. And the Lord God who rules all things will wipe away the tears from all faces. The Lord has spoken and therefore it will come to pass. One day there will be no more sin and death and instead it will be a time of eternal joy and celebration.

Until then, however, there will have to be days like today. Death is this veil that covers us all. It darkens our lives. It alters our plans, harasses our joy, and sours and makes bitter our gladness. It can hover over us through sickness, ominously hanging over our heads for months upon years, or death can come suddenly and silently.

Certainly we recognize that there is an element of shock that we are all trying to deal with here. Some of us just saw Betty. Some of us just talked to her, played cards with her. You had planned to spend time with her this weekend. A time that was supposed to be marked by lighthearted thanksgiving has instead become a time in which hearts have been suddenly made heavy. Suddenly there is one less dear friend at the table when it is time to play cards or visit. That seat at the table was empty for Thanksgiving. It will still be odd when she is not around for Christmas. There is this dark veil of death that hangs over us.

It is that way for many people. Death does not just affect the few that are gathered here today. It does not just alter the plans of one family or one community; it hangs over all of us, there are a plenty of chairs that are now empty and it hurts. But to say that this is just something that happens to everyone is not much comfort at all, that brings no substantial consolation.

Our Almighty and gracious God in his goodness, in his love, gives us real comfort. He supplies us with certain hope. He not only eases our pain but he gives us joy. The Bible tells us that death came to all because all sinned, but God's Word also tells us, "**For in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive**". Jesus, the firstfruits, of those who have fallen asleep says to you, **Because I live you also will live. I am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me will never die.** Just as Jesus rose from the dust of death and was gathered to the joy of heaven, so too God will raise up all people and gather to himself those who believe in Jesus. Jesus is the firstfruits and we are the harvest.

And so, even in this time of sorrow we have reason to rejoice. We have confidence and joy given to us by our gracious Lord and Savior. We have reason to give thanks and to celebrate and to be happy even in the midst of such profound sadness. Listen to these words of God from the book of Isaiah again. Hear the warm inviting words describing this wonderful banquet. Listen again as the prophet depicts the sad reality of death, but then take in the joy, gaze upon the absolute joy and victory that Isaiah lays before us. **On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces;**

A great feast, a great celebration, for all of God's people, and did you notice who prepared this feast for you? Isaiah reports that it is the Lord himself. The Almighty God prepares this feast for you. What an honor! What relief! God did what I could not do. He did what Betty couldn't do. Jesus lived a perfect life. Jesus died for my sins, for your sins, for Betty's sins. And he rose from the dead to assure us that this is true. In his

word he comes to us and blesses us time and again with this message of comfort; this truth that picks us up even in the most difficult times. Our God saves us. He rescues us from death and he gives his people the unending joy of heaven.

The LORD Almighty prepared this feast for Betty. In love and care for Betty he prepared a place for her in the joys of heaven, and when he knew the time was right he called her to come home and enjoy this wonderful celebration, this glorious feast.

Betty was a cook for a long time at the Danube school and she would tell you that she enjoyed her work. She was no stranger to the kitchen at home as she took care of all of her children. But there is a note back there on one of the boards - a little newsletter article out on one of the displays - that grabbed my attention. When asked once what words best describe her, she answered, "Let's go out to eat!"

What a treat this is that God prepared this feast for Betty and that he prepares it for you and me! What a treat that God would love us so much that he himself would prepare this celebration for us his people. He has done it all for us. God came to this world. He defeated sin with his holy life. He served up a life of righteousness and perfection and he laid it before us. He worked and toiled and suffered for your sins. He took them away. He took away your sins and cleansed you and made you his own. Once smothered by nothing but sin and death, you are now set free, you are made holy by Christ's righteousness. Forgiveness, eternal life, salvation are all given to us freely. Even in the face of death we have comfort, we have encouragement. The LORD has given us victory and joy. Death cannot defeat us. Death cannot rob us of our joy in Christ.

Today is a day of sadness, but today our joy is greater than our sadness. For while Betty's seat on earth is empty, her place in heaven is full. She now enjoys the celebration of heaven. Together with all the saints who have died in faith, her soul has been taken from this world of trouble and has been received into the endless bliss of heaven. She is gathered with her loved ones, with her fellow believers, and with her Lord and she will be seated at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Today even in the midst of our tears and our heavy hearts we have much to be thankful for, we thank God for the wonderful gift he gave to us in Betty. We thank him for the precious memories of this strong and fun-loving woman. And we thank God that she fell asleep in peace. But above all we give thanks and we celebrate His salvation. For today, the Lord reminds us of that wonderful reality that he give to all his people and it something for which we are eternally thankful. Our LORD tells us this coming feast that will be for all his people. God has prepared a feast for Betty, he has prepared a feast for you, and one day he rip away that dark veil of death forever and he will bring us body and soul into the celebration of heaven. Heaven will be like a feast, a blessed banquet, an endless day of Thanksgiving prepared and made ready for you by your Lord and Savior. ***The LORD has spoken*** and therefore this will come to pass. And therefore as God's grateful people today we say, ***"This is the LORD, let us trust in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."*** Amen.