

The Christian Funeral of Jean Voelz
St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Danube
Pastor Mike Kuschel
October 27, 2016
11:00am

Psalm 46

¹ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, ³though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. ⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. ⁵God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day..... ¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." ¹¹The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

The LORD is our Refuge and Strength. Let us be still and know that the Lord is God.

We come here today to seek comfort in our sorrow. It is so difficult to lose a loved one. And when I think of Jean and this family now gathered before me, I think of how this family rallied around her strength. I think of this little frail looking woman surrounded by family, including these big tough looking guys. But with just a look, a witty comment, a point of her finger she could remind everybody who was in charge. She was a great source of joy, of pride, of love, and strength. And now so suddenly she is gone.

It has been such a busy time these last few days. The busyness of harvest time was put on hold when mom got sick, then the urgent trip to the hospital, then up to St. Cloud, then the scramble to get the family to go see Grandma Jean, even when the hours turned to a few days there was the still the anxious busyness of waiting, wondering. Soon after her death there was the activity of arranging things for today. And now we are here and for at least an hour we pause and we take a moment to grieve together.

This was so all unexpected, all so sudden, so shocking. In a matter of days, life was turned upside down and flipped on its side as waves of grief and sadness, shock and sorrow, change and loss, continue to crash against you. Suddenly life as usual was thrown into such turmoil. Even in the relatively quiet moments of the past few busy days this loss and pain hits as you come back into a house that is suddenly so quiet. You realize that going about your daily routine won't ever quite be the same and it is a blow that hits you both when you see it coming and when you least expect it. All this takes its toll as all this crashes against you.

In this storm of turmoil of change and sorrow it is therefore, good to be still. It is good to be gathered with family and friends. It is good to take some time to take a breath and mourn and grieve together while you share stories of the past. Time stops for a while as you look at pictures and tell stories of Grandma Jean. It is good to take a moment and support each other in this time of sorrow.

It is even better yet to take a moment to come together in order to not only be still but to be still and find refuge in words of God. In this time of turmoil, in the busyness of these last few days, God is there to be our refuge and strength. The Lord encourages us to not only to pause, to take a breath and a break, he speaks to you through his word and the Almighty God says to you in a life-shaking moment like this to, “Be still and know that I am God.”

More than anything in this life, death has this way of creating fear and causing turmoil. It leaves those left in its wake to deal with pain and uncertainty. But our God is there, now and in the days ahead, to hold us up, to give us strength, to sustain us, and lift us up. Our God is here even in our fear, even in our sadness, and sorrow, he is here to be our refuge, to be our strength, to be our ever-present help in trouble. And though today we are confronted by this sudden death, this shocking reality, we are not swept away but standing in Christ we can be at peace.

In his word God prepares us for this storm. He shows us in his word that death came through sin and therefore death comes to all. He prepares us by reminding us that we were created from the dust of the earth and to dust we shall return. But of course all that is all so obvious on a day like today. A person who has never heard the word of God can figure that out by looking at the reality of a day like today. But God blesses those who hear and treasure his Word as he reveals himself as a refuge and strength for those who believe in him. He prepares us and then he offers us the shelter of his love and the promise of eternal life made sure and certain in Christ Jesus.

Think of a literal storm and how when prepared we can get ourselves ready, make arrangements, find the proper shelter. But for those who are not aware of the coming storm, those caught completely unprepared they are not so fortunate. Now think about things on a spiritual level. For those who do not know the LORD, death can be completely devastating. To lose a loved one who is so close, so beloved, so dear, can sweep them away into a deep despair. The turmoil of change and loss and sorrow is so much for a human being to bear. But God in his goodness is the refuge of those who believe in him. Through his gift of faith, he prepares and strengthens us, he cares for and protects those who believe in him, who trust in Jesus as their Savior. When death came near we huddled under the shelter of his word. God’s Word was spoken over your mother, your grandmother, and in that place of fear and sadness there was also refuge and strength, hope and peace. Jean found strength in God’s Word, the assurances of heaven. And when we were done with our devotion, our time in God’s Word, she was able to say what she always said after we had one of our visits, one of our meditations on God’s Word. In a calm and steady voice, she said, “Thank you.” The storms of death came so suddenly and yet the LORD gave her refuge and peace and strength.

This morning he does the same for you. And today he reminds you that now and *in the days ahead* he is there to give you shelter, to give you the comfort of his words. As he speaks to us in his Word he tells us of his undeserved love. God tells us, yes, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. In his Holy Word he tells us of how he loved the world, he loved sinners like you and me who deserved nothing but

death and hell and instead he gave us his son. He loved Jean so much that he sent a Savior to live and die and rise again in order to defeat sin and death for her, for you, for me.

Jesus speaks words of comfort to those who are struggling under the turmoil of loss and pain and sin and strife. ***Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).*** He comes to us and in the midst of our fears and sorrows he speaks these incredible words of truth and comfort. ***I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live even though he dies. Whoever lives and believes in me will never die (John 11:25).*** He says to us who believe in him, ***trust in God, trust also in me. In my father's house there are many rooms (John 14:1). I have prepared a place for Jean. I have prepared a place for you.***

The pain of loss is like a rainstorm that lingers. It will be like rainclouds that return. There will be good days when you remember her strength and all that she meant to you, but there will also be difficult moments and days that cause frustration and trouble. You will have to weather, to endure, those days as you will miss her. Some days will be more difficult than others. But this is the ongoing assurance that our God gives to you. God is your refuge and strength, your ever-present help in trouble.

In life and in death this was a great source of peace and strength for Jean. God was her refuge. Through all the ups and downs of life. Through her own losses of a sister, a brother, a husband, this was her refuge. Jesus Christ is there to forgive our sins, to guide us through life, and to grant us eternal life. This was the faith that she held onto, the hope that held her fast when death came so suddenly.

The scene depicted by the psalmist is one of great contrast. The earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, the waters roar and foam, and the mountains quake with their surging. This description of such tremendous turmoil then gives way to the complete serenity that God gives to his people. ***4There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,*** Think of the peace of one of those fishing trips that she so enjoyed and then multiple that an infinite amount as she now dwells with her God and God dwells with her. In his house, in the presence of his Word, God gives us a taste of that peace. ***The holy place where the Most High dwells. 5God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day..... 10 "Be still, and know that I am God;***

God holds up that same peace to you. Find refuge and peace in him, in his holy word. Bring your children under this holy shelter as you teach them about their Lord and Savior. As you teach them about the victory over sin and death that Jesus won and how because of Jesus, Auntie Jean, Grandma Jean now dwells with God forever in heaven. Find refuge and peace in the fellowship of the church. For in a way this is what we do every Sunday, we come out of the storms and the troubles of life and for an hour or so as we come together and we pause from the busyness of life and we together we gather under the shelter and protection of his love. Here we are assured of his love and care. We are given guidance and strength from our holy God as we hear his word and exalt his name and proclaim his praise. Now and in the days ahead, the LORD is here in his holy Word to hold us up and strengthen us in ways that no one or nothing else ever could. Now and in the days ahead God is in your home and in your life whenever you run to the family altar

of having devotions in your home, as you read and study the word of Christ together as a family.

God is our refuge and strength. Today he provides for us refuge and strength through his holy Word, through his precious promises, through the gospel truth that we have a Savior who grants those who believe in him eternal life. Death has lost its sting for those who are in Christ Jesus!

That does mean it doesn't hurt at all. The winds of change, the storms of loss and death crash against you, but because God is there for you, you will not be swept away. It hurts that she is gone, but we know where she has gone. We know what God has done for her. At her baptism a little girl was made a child of God through baptism. She was confirmed and strengthened in the faith in this church as she grew in the faith. She was comforted and given peace through the hearing and learning of God's Holy Word throughout her life. She found refuge and rejoiced in her God in this place and in God's house even on her trips to Arizona and she was so glad to worship her LORD among God's people there. She found refuge and peace and strength as we visited across the kitchen table during our visits in your home. In her last days she found refuge in the holy Word of God and then the LORD called her to a place where there is no need for refuge anymore. Through faith in Christ Jean enjoys the perfect peace, the perfect tranquility and security of heaven. Through our tears we rejoice, we give thanks to God, we exalt the name of Jesus, because we know and believe and confess that through faith she has crossed over from death to life and now she is with her LORD and all those who have died in faith in the everlasting paradise of heaven.

Yes, life has been turned upside down so suddenly. Life changes, when you lose a friend, when you lose an aunt, a mother, a grandmother who was so near and dear. It hurts that she isn't there. But God in his goodness gives us much needed refuge in his Holy Word and in precious promises. Today and in the days ahead let us be still and know that the LORD is God. Today and in the days ahead let us consider the great things that God has done for us, and for Jean. Today and in the days ahead let us rejoice and exalt and lift up the name of the LORD Jesus Christ. Today as well as in the storms and troubles, the joys and the pains of everyday life let us run to our God, to his shelter and protection and his love. ***For God is our refuge and strength an ever-present help in trouble. Amen.***