**11/9/24**

**A Life of Service**

**John 14:1-6**

Dear family members, friends, and congregation of Deborah, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (1) **Amen.**

Welcome to each and every one of you that had it on your heart to join us here today. Unfortunately, we all know that our time spent here on this ball of mud has an end point, and as a result we need to get together in times like this to say farewell. So, I want to thank you all for joining together as family, friends, and Debbie’s congregation in this very place to support one another as we pay memory and respect for the life she lived and the very lives she touched. Praise be to God for blessing us and allowing Deborah West to be a part of our church family and our lives for sure. I will also apologize to her daughter, Jennifer, at this time, because let me tell you as I wrote this sermon and often thought of your mother, I struggled with calling her by her formal name. As a result, I am certain you will hear me refer to her as Debbie often. I apologize, and you can always beat me up after the service if that frustrates you. However, don’t you think that your mother won’t see that or give you a nudge from above!

Alright, I will try and be serious here, but sometimes that is just not how I roll. I will tell you that as we remember folks we really need to remember the very joy that we found with them during the time they spent with us, and we do not need to just focus on the very sorrow that we feel since they have left this life. I know Debbie would expect that of us all of course, I know she would expect there to be a few more smiles than tears.

I know that we all came to know Debbie in various times and places in our lives, and I am certain that we all had our laughs and even our frustrations with her at one point or another for sure. Debbie was definitely a person that wore her heart on her sleeve, and you often knew how she felt or what she was thinking as well. Now, I can very easily identify with that, as our personalities were very similar. This is of course is how we came to be friends, and not just members of the congregation here at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church. I also can confirm that we did indeed butt heads at times as well, but that actually was a blessing because we were active in this congregation trying to do things and forge forward with projects or topics on church council. I am also quite certain that she would be the one leading the committee with our upcoming 75th Anniversary if she were still here today.

Debbie was indeed a wonderful woman, and more so she was a woman of faith. Now, one might think that her faith would have wavered when her son passed away several years ago. However, this was the very point in her life where her faith actually heightened instead. I mean no one ever imagines burying their son, but Debbie knew she needed to go to her eternal father for answers and support. She dug her heels in and knew that she needed to dive into her faith if she was going to be able to continue to hold it together and get through things for herself, for her daughter, and for others as well. I also believe this is precisely why Debbie was able to love and care for several people over the course of her lifetime too. She lived a life of service whether she was in the military, working in the healthcare field, volunteering at the library or other places, and providing peace and comfort through various projects like the prayer shawls she created. Debbie’s heart was always focused on God, and I am quite sure she offered up several prayers to her favorite Saint, Patrick, for guidance as well.

I am extremely thankful that Debbie left an impact on my life personally and professionally, and I am thankful that she for sure showed others just a little bit of Christ by listening and helping them out where she could. I am also glad that Debbie had me over her house a while back to talk and provide her with Home Communion. She was all too worried about what her place looked like, and what she looked like as well because she was continuing with her treatments during her health battles. However, I know she was tired of me bugging her, and she knew that if I kept emailing her so I could get time with her. I also know she was proud that I was following the call to ministry. Well, of course that was not without offering her words of advice and concern, as she was very close to our former Pastors, Joanne Saxe and Leah Lavelle. I can only imagine some of the things they shared during parties and their travels together to various countries and such. As a result, Debbie knew a thing or two about clergy and the life of ministry, and I would like to think she was being protective and supportive for sure.

Now, I just may have painted a little picture of who Debbie was to this point. However, I assure you that was after following several readings of her Obituary, and spending time in discussion with her daughter, Jennifer. What I must also remind you of is that there is much more business to take care of here. For I stand in front of you as a Vicar, a Seminary Student, and as someone whom I know Debbie expected to share the very message from our Gospel Reading. Debbie indeed attended church here for several years to be fed with the Word of God and to receive Holy Communion for sure. So, you can rest assured that I am going to continue intertwining memories of Debbie and the Word of God throughout the rest of my message here. I can only hope to share with you all just a little more glimpse into the fabulous life that Debbie led here on earth, and her very ministry, as well as the very works and ministry of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit as well.

I know for certain, that when we got the news of Debbie’s passing, and over these past few months, that at one point or another we might have felt shock, disbelief, frustration, guilt, anger, and sadness. I am even sure that a few of us may have wished we had that one final time to reach out to Debbie or visit with her before her passing. Well, I am standing here to inform everyone that any and all those feelings are extremely normal. They are indeed several pieces of that very puzzle we all have unfortunately come to know too well over time as the process of loss and grief. Unfortunately, those feelings will not just magically go away. They are extremely normal to continue to have in the days and months and years that lie ahead. So, I want to remind everyone to seek comfort in the Lord our God, and to not push those very feelings down or inside. Seeking comfort and refuge in God is what he desires and comes to expect, and we should not hesitate or be afraid to do so. I also know for certain that Debbie would want and expect that from every one of us as well.

We are also reminded to seek out and provide support to one another too. With that in mind I would like to extend condolences to the family and friends of Debbie from those of us here at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church. It is indeed very hard saying good-bye to a church member and friend, and I know Debbie will be greatly missed for sure. I want to extend our congregation’s prayers and support to all of you. I want you to know that we are here for your continued prayers and support.

Alright, I know that Debbie would be telling me to get on with it right about now. She would not expect all this talking up here without me getting to the very Gospel Reading and Message that we heard. So, let’s experience the very words that our Gospel Reading starts out with. “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” (2) That for sure is easier said than done. I know for certain that my heart is troubled because I do not have Debbie to continue to shoot emails back and forth with, or just to be able to get some alternative thoughts, guidance, and support from. However, what I have come to learn is that there was more to that very first verse. It also says, “Believe in God, believe also in me.” As I believed in Debbie, just like we all believe in Jesus Christ. For Debbie was magnificently and wonderfully created in the very image and likeness of God for sure. And through our very trust and understanding, as well as our very belief in God, we come to know the Holy Spirit is at work in us and alongside all of us as well. They will continue to intercede where Debbie could not, and unfortunately where she cannot anymore.

With that being said I am forever grateful that Debbie fought hard to provide so much insight and planning that went into the Bazaars. She knew over time that she was not going to be here to continue on the annual event to raise money for the church, and to be able to connect with the community. We may not do things the exact way that Debbie did them over the years, but the legacy continues to hold on in an event that has become our Annual Rummage Sale. The event will still manage to carry on her initial thought process, purpose, ministry, and some of her design for years to come for sure.

Now, as sure as I am of the fact that Debbie would say enough about me, get on with it, I got laundry to do and some sewing and knitting to do after we eat lunch here today. Let’s keep things moving along so God’s work can be done, and that we can share something with others who are coming up against loss and grief in their very lives as well. With that being said I am certain she would want me to share with you and remind you of the very fact that “The resurrection is the center of Christian funerals—or at least it should be. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is our hope. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, if Jesus did not rise from the dead then we are of all people to be pitied the most.” (5)

It is indeed popular during funeral and memorial services for there to be a celebration and honoring of the life and legacy of the deceased. “Certainly, remembering and celebrating the impact that the person has had upon us is important—but this isn’t the main reason we gather as Christians. Christians gather to hear the Word of God proclaimed that there is life after death and to celebrate this truth—this (very) reality.” (5) Now, thankfully, “Jesus doesn’t give us a long list of instructions on what to do to get to heaven. Instead, he comes to guide us. When you have someone who has walked the path before and who knows the way, you can (rest) assured that you will arrive at your destination and that you do not need to worry or fear.” (5)

We are also comforted and forever reminded of the words we heard earlier, and we need to realize that “When we have questions about death we need to stop and listen, listen to Jesus and hear His word which tells us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." but it can be hard advice…. We do not like to think about death if we have any doubts about our own readiness. But still Jesus says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled."” (4) “One of the promises that Jesus makes to his disciples is, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” Though death may separate us from our family and friends—at least for a time—we (come to the very realization that we) will never be separated from Jesus.” (5)

I also know for certain that “The days, weeks, and months ahead are going to be rough, you’ll have good days and bad days, you’ll miss a mother, a family member, a community member, a church member, and a friend; but if there’s one thing that will get you through that, is grace. Look around today, see all these faces here? We’re all here to show that love and grace that Christ first gave to us by continuing to love and support each other today and in the future.” (2) Debbie “…would want to see that each one of us here today knows that just as Jesus prepared a place for him, that He is preparing a place for each one of us, and that one day, He will call us from this life of pain, tears, and strife, to an eternal life of joy, peace, and comfort!” (3) We know for certain that “Death has been conquered by the cross of Christ. There is life after death—life with Jesus.” (5)

As we reflect on our continued lives on this ball of mud, as we imagine what our message and ministry might be, and as we imagine what our lives might be without Debbie. We can sit back and say Thank You Lord! We can thank the Lord our God for blessing us with Debbie in our lives. We can thank the Lord our God for the pictures and the memories, the love and support, the honesty and the mindset, the tears and the laughter, the skills and the knowledge that Debbie imparted on all of us. We do indeed thank the Lord our God for this good and faithful servant who committed her life to service of her fellow neighbor, and despite our loss and grief we are thankful and rejoice that she has now been called to eternal rest and salvation with our Triune God.

Amen.

**References**

(1) BibleGateway.com

(2) SermonCentral.com

 Grace

 Contributed by Christopher Martin on Dec 18, 2007

 Scripture: John 14:1-6

 Denomination: Lutheran

(3) SermonCentral.com

 "Freda's Homecoming"

 Contributed by Christopher Martin on Dec 18, 2007

 Scripture: John 14:1-6

 Denomination: Lutheran

(4) SermonCentral.com

 Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled

 Contributed by Christopher Raiford on Sep 2, 2004

 Scripture: John 14:1-6

 Denomination: Lutheran

(5) SermonCentral.com

 Fear Of Life's Final Moments Series

 Contributed by Kevin Ruffcorn on Feb 2, 2010

 Scripture: John 14:1-6

 Denomination: Lutheran

**John 14:1-6**

1Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 2In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. 4And you know the way to the place where I am going." 5Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

**EVOY’S OBITUARY**

Deborah A. (Miller) West, born November 10, 1952 in Norristown, PA, entered into life eternal Wednesday, July 3rd at her residence in Cape May Court House, NJ.

The daughter of the late Kenneth Miller and Helen (Whitenight) Miller, Debbie grew up in Trooper, PA and attended Methacton High School. She also attended Cape May County Technical School where she earned her Licensed Practical Nursing Diploma and worked for several facilities throughout NJ. She later served our country in the United State Air Force as a medical service specialist (Sgt). Debbie also was a paramedic at the Goodwill Fire Company in Pottstown PA.

She lived in Limerick, PA for 20 years before relocating and eventually retiring in Cape May Court House, NJ for the next 23 years. Debbie was a sewing instructor for the Avalon Public Library, long time member of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Villas, and was a service officer for both the Stone Harbor and Cape May County American Legion. She was a paramedic, an avid seamstress, gardener, volunteer, traveler, and lover of Philadelphia sports.

Debbie was preceded in death by her son, Richard West, and is survived by her daughter, Jennifer (Miller) Shearer, brother Kenneth Miller, Jr., sister Sandy Miller-Francella, brother Timothy Miller, sister Diane (Miller) Kinlaw, and Havanese dog, Scrappy.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Stone Harbor American Legion, Post 331, Stone Harbor, NJ, Holy Spirit Lutheran Church Capital Improvement Fund 1220 Bayshore Rd Villas, NJ, or the Avalon Free Public Library, 235 32nd St. Avalon, NJ.

Evoy Funeral Homes, Inc. 3218 Bayshore Road North Cape May NJ 08204 has been entrusted with arrangements. A memorial service will be held at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, 11:00 am, Saturday, November 9th, 2024.

**Source:**

https://evoyfuneralhome.com/tribute/details/3648/Deborah-West/obituary.html#tribute-start