**8/24/23**

**Guilt & Loss**

**John 14:1-6**

Dear family members and friends of Alice,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (1) **Amen.**

First and foremost, I want to pass along condolences from those of us at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church. It is very hard saying good-bye to a friend and church member. Alice was an active part of our congregation and our ministry for several years. We will miss her greatly, and we will remember the lives she had touched through our congregation, the community, and through her ministry and support of the food pantry. Our congregation’s prayers and support are extended to all of you, and please know that we are here for your continued prayers and support as well. Praise be to God for allowing Alice to be a part of our lives.

If I were to ask you how or what you were feeling I am pretty sure that many of you could identify or admit to having feelings of shock, disbelief, frustration, guilt, anger, or sadness over the past few days since we learned of Alice’s passing. I will go on record as being the first one to admit that guilt was the primary feeling I had experienced. For some reason this Sunday I had come to realize that I had not seen Alice in a church pew in a little while. Quite frankly, maybe it was even since I started this position as Vicar back in April. Now, awkwardly enough, if you happened to look at my bulletin cover from this past Sunday’s Worship Service, you would have seen that I had written in the top corner to call Alice. However, yet again, God had a different way of handling things. Before I could get to making that call to Alice I ended up getting a call the very next morning from the staff here at Evoy’s Funeral Home. Unfortunately, they had to inform me of Alice’s passing. Man!!! I really missed out on my chance at touching base with her. Unfortunately, life happens to get in the way all too often. I really do feel guilty for not reaching out sooner. I am also sure a few of you may have wished you had that one final time to reach out to Alice or visit with her before her passing just like me. Well, I am standing here to inform you that feeling is rather normal, and that indeed is one of the many parts of the grief process. I am also here to inform you that those other feelings I listed before are also extremely normal to continue to have. You do not need to push them down in any shape, way, or form. Even though we all know and recognize that our very own lives have a time frame on this earth, it still does not make it any easier to confront death and the loss of a loved one. We miss that person greatly in so many ways, and that is even if it was just a simple warm and heartfelt smile or greeting. Unfortunately, we have to come to the realization that person is no longer here with us, and for lack of better words, that admittedly really stinks. Unfortunately, Alice will not be asking for one more ride on the back of an ATV while she is spending time with her family, but thank God for that experience, and thank God Peggy had it on her heart to share that awesome memory and picture with me just the other day. That managed to take away just a little bit of the guilt I had going on in my heart and my mind, as it showed me she was still out enjoying life and family, and was not just at home without love or care from anyone.

With all of that being said, and probably a small tear in the corner of my eye, I do know for certain that the last time I saw Alice at church she had been struggling to hear me. Now, mind you, I was standing right next to her talking while she was sitting in her pew prior to our worship service. I do know that I can be pretty loud, and maybe I just simply missed out on the fact that she got pretty crafty at reading lips over the course of time. Maybe, just maybe, I was just standing and talking to her too closely. Well, Alice you do know that is why they make those devices to put in your ears, and you were not supposed to leave them on a table or in your dresser drawer at home. I say this because I do know that Alice admitted to not wearing her hearing aids all too often. I mean I even learned from sitting down with family the other day that the only time those buggers were going in her ears was at 7PM each evening to catch Jeopardy and Wheel of Fortune. Well Alice, I know you are probably catching up with Alex Trebek if he is up there in one of those many dwelling places the Lord has informed us he has been preparing for us in our Gospel Reading today. And, if that is the case, I want to remind you of one thing Alice, do not forget to form your answer in the form of a question! Sorry, I apologize, I am always good for a bad joke or two, and yes that is even at a funeral.

Alright, let me get back on track here. What I did know about Alice was that she was good friends with a few ladies at church. I really do know that she loved the ministry of the food pantry as well. Now, whether it was sorting food, packing bags, or knowing that getting the food in the hands of those in need would just let them get to know Jesus’ love for them a little more… Alice was on it! I know I even had a few run-ins with her when I tried to help out with the food pantry. As you can imagine, sometimes practices and things need to change over time. Well… not for Alice! I mean I may have met my match for stubborn… I, I, I mean strong-willed. She knew what to do, and she was going to do it the certain way she had been doing it. I even remember when we built our new larger food pantry she wanted the shelf installed on the wall at a certain height. She informed us that was how she was going to pack those bags, and that was the height it needed to be at, and that was just how it was going to work. Praise be to God for her vision, for her service, and for her tenacity.

As a strong and independent woman, who at a time or two was a barefoot and pregnant wife, I could imagine Alice would want us to know to count on Jesus. As she would undoubtedly show her motherly nature, and she would also show her continued commitment to a marriage that lasted for 56 years until her husband passed away in 2002. She would show her husband, and would want us to know that being an equal partner is vital to success. We need to partner up in our faith, and not go at it alone. So, despite my jokes earlier, I am for certain that Alice would want us 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. This is no time for trite words, easy assurances. 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) 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 sister, an aunt, a grandmother, a great grandmother, a great-great grandmother, 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) Alice “…would want to see that each one of us here today knows that just as Jesus prepared a place for her, 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) Thank you Lord! Thank you for blessing us with Alice your good and faithful servant!

Amen.

**References**

(1) Bible.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

**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.