

The Peace that Passes Surpasses Understanding

Funeral Address for Darlyne Clausnitzer

Text: Philippians 4:4-7

Dear Friends and Family of Darlyne Clausnitzer, and especially on this day, Willie, Tim, Todd, Blaine and the rest of Darlyne's immediate family:

Anyone who knows this particular family will know that this will be a day filled with far more laughter than tears; filled with the spirit of celebration rather than despondent mourning. There will be tears, of course, but for ourselves, not for her – for she is blissfully now asleep in her Savior's arms. The temporary separation makes this a solemn occasion, yet amongst the solemnity we today share a victory celebration *according to her direction and wishes*, for in Darlyne Clausnitzer our Savior has once again triumphed over sin, death, and hell and has rescued yet another soul forever from the temptation or power of our great adversary. Thanks be to God, who has given us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We turn naturally to our God and to his Word for guidance and comfort at all times – but especially times like these. That bit of Scripture that will guide, comfort, and encourage us this morning is found in Paul's Letter to the Philippians, the Fourth Chapter:

Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

So far the very words of our God. Confident that these are God's Words and trusting in his promise to speak to us and bless us through the study of these words, so we pray: ***"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed in Jesus Christ:

Goodbyes tend to be hard. "See you soon" – not so hard. Our natural tendency at times like this is to always use the past tense to refer to those fellow-Christians who have gone ahead. So we ask things like, "How *did* you know Darlyne?" rather than "How *do* you know Darlyne?" This is understandable of course since physical death certainly does usher in a dramatic change in our lives, and because our society has always referred to those who have died in the past tense. That's because to the world this is final – the end of the story. Christians know that it isn't the end. That's why just as we wouldn't refer to a child who has gone off to college, or a friend who has gone off to work in another part of the country in the past tense, so too Christians should not think in terms of "gone" but "gone ahead." Scripture does tell us that certain relationships come to an end. So Darlyne was your wife, but she is still your best friend. She not was but is your mom, grandmother, sister.

This is more than just wishful thinking on the part of those of us who grasp for comfort at times like this. True comfort can never come by denying reality. Christians, above all others, need to deal in reality. We do so here this morning, for these are sure and certain facts which God has revealed to us in his Word. You will recall, for example, how Mary and Martha were troubled by the death of their brother Lazarus. Do you remember what Jesus said to them? He began by telling them: ***"Your brother will rise again."*** Martha's remarkable faith is evident when she replies, ***"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."*** Yet note carefully Jesus' response: ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."*** John 11:23-26

Far from false comfort, this is absolute divine truth. Jesus himself here teaches us that a Christian's soul or spirit may well have to be separated from the physical shell or body for a time, but that soul – which is really the essence of a human being – does not die. Not ever. Not for a Christian. Though we will not be privileged to see this dear woman as we once knew her here in time, she most certainly isn't "gone forever"; she has been carried to her Savior's side – very much alive. There she exists even now in a state of perfect bliss – timelessly awaiting the resurrection on the Last Day.

Again, this is not just wishful thinking on our part. We have God's Word on it, as Jesus himself also said **"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth..."** John 5:28-29 Again we read in Romans 8:16-17, **"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ... that we may also be glorified together."**

This is exactly why God the Holy Spirit can speak to us in our text the way he does; this is why, no matter what the circumstances – even in difficult times like this – he can and does say to us: **"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"**

Wouldn't these be cold and heartless words in the absence of Christian faith, in the absence of Jesus Christ? Wouldn't they represent an insensitive cruelty of the highest order if not for the fact that Christian loved ones have not gone, but gone ahead? Why else would he, could he, say, **"Rejoice in the Lord always."** at a time like this?

That is why, today, we do not grieve for Darlyne; we are overjoyed for her. Why? Because right up until the very time that she fell into a sleep from which she did not awaken, she looked me square in the eye, unhesitatingly confessed her sins, and expressed her rock-solid trust in Jesus as her Savior – the One who earned her forgiveness for her. Scripture offers only one possible scenario for those who so die: **"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved."** Again in John's First Epistle: **"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** 1 John 1:8-9

This also helps to explain why Christian funerals do not seek to honor those who have fallen asleep, but rather the God who has called his child home. Everything good in Darlyne – and there was so much that was good – all was a gift. **"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above."** Her faith in her Savior itself was a gift, for Jesus himself said **"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain."** John 15:16 That's also why when we recount all of the positive attributes, we never regard them as that by which Darlyne was saved. The Bible simply does not allow it.

Darlyne Clausnitzer was a sinner, and as a sinner there was absolutely nothing that she could ever offer to a holy God to pay for her sins. That payment had to come from an outside source. Someone else had to provide that goodness and had to credit that goodness – utter perfection, in fact – to her account. This, in fact, is exactly that which makes Christianity different from all other religions in the world. All other religions demand that man himself must provide his own goodness. Only Christianity teaches that man is utterly incapable of such restitution, but that Jesus earned the full payment for sin in our place, as our Substitute.

Our text gives us an example of how or why Darlyne too needed a Savior. There we are told: **"Be anxious for nothing."** Like wives and mothers the world round, Darlyne was anxious about many things. Her family will recall things like, **"Willie, get up and go find my mother!"** and **"I just want my boys to be okay"** and **"I'm just so worried about my grandchildren."** **"Oh I hope we don't lose to Mandan."**

How silly to pretend that Darlyne earned heaven. She herself would laugh at the very notion - rightly so. That wasn't her confidence, nor should it be ours. Our confidence is that she has a Savior.

Christians, again, need to be realists – at all times, but especially at such times as this. The world clings desperately to make-believe and unsubstantiated myths for their comfort. Yet since such things aren't based on reality, they can afford no true, lasting comfort. So, for example, some might choose to believe that a loved one is *“still here with us”* or that a loved one *“is looking down on us from heaven.”* Scripture gives us no reason to believe such things – thanks be to God! What kind of existence would that be – having to witness all the pain and suffering of this world while impotent to do anything about it? You, her family and friends, know full well how much she cared for you and how distraught she would be if any of you suffered in any way. Again, what torment to have to witness sin, sickness, frustration, pain, loneliness, sorrow – all of the bad things that sin brought into God's perfect creation.

Thanks be to God that that is certainly not the reality taught by God in his Word. Thanks be to God that that is not the state in which our Christian loved ones exist after their spirits slip the bonds of this mortal shell.

That is why our text can speak as it does - ***“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”*** That is why such words are not hollow or heartless but real and right -- utterly loving and compassionate. That is also why our text can and does go on to tell us to ***“be anxious for nothing,”*** and can do so without having those words sound inappropriate, cold, or loveless. The reason *anxiety* is inappropriate is, of course, that God is in control; our times are in his loving hands. Knowing that we will face difficult days (like this) during our time on earth, our text then gives us the right course of action, the exact opposite of anxiety and worry when it says, ***“but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”*** God, the ultimate friend – the one who not only cares but who has the power to help, to solve, every single one of our problems and needs – that's who here invites you to come to him with your requests in the difficult days ahead. And then he adds this incredible promise at the end of our text: ***“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”***

That's the bottom line, isn't it? That why when we weep today we weep for ourselves, but never for Darlyne. Her heart, her mind, was ***“guarded”*** – kept and preserved - by her Savior throughout her time of grace on earth. That same God has now completed the work he began in her at her baptism, and the result is that she now rests, safe and secure for all eternity.

God grant that each one of us here will one day – through faith alone in Jesus Christ – join her there. Amen.