

Job 19:25-27 “Laughing With the Lord”

Funeral Sermon for Karen Wagner - January 4, 2021

Our Lord has gathered us here today in memory not only of Karen Wagner, a beloved wife, mother, grandmother, friend and sister in Christ, but especially to remind us of His promises to Karen and to all of us through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Because of God’s promises in Christ, God enabled Job to say even during the most tragic time of his life, *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”* Because of our faith in God’s promises in Christ, we can say the same thing of ourselves and our loved ones, like Karen, who have died in the Lord.

Gordon remembers one of Karen’s sayings that she had come to better appreciate especially during the Job-like troubles in her life: “The minute you put a plan together, God laughs.” I’m sure Karen didn’t mean by this that we shouldn’t make plans in this world; plans to use the things God gives us for the good of others. But it did remind Karen that what we, from our limited sight, think is best isn’t always what God knows is best. *“For,”* as God said, *“as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts that your thoughts”* (Isaiah 55:9).

Therefore, even though Karen was faithful in sharing her gift of teaching with her 5th grade and Jr. High students. And even though she was also faithful in sharing some of these same gifts here at Redeemer as the Chairman of the Parish School Board in years past, and more recently in being involved with many other aspects of the church’s life of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others. This didn’t mean that everything went according to what Karen had planned.

No doubt it was the same for Job. Even though Job had also been faithful in sharing the gifts God had given him, including his faith, with his family and others. This didn’t mean that everything went according to what he had planned.

Why? One of the reasons is because none of the good and faithful things we do will get rid of the effects of our sins. And Job, like Karen, was not only *“righteous”* because of the faith that God had given them, but they were also sinners (Job 7:21; Romans 3:23). And there is only one way to get rid of the effects of our sins. *“The wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). All the suffering and death in this world is a constant reminder of this truth: the wages of sin is eternal suffering and death, from which we cannot set ourselves free (Luke 18:9-14).

That's the bad news. The Good News is that the only one who did not deserve to suffer and die was Jesus, who was without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). Yet, Jesus went through more suffering and death than any one of us, even Job. Not for His sins but for ours. And after His death as a man, whose birth we recently celebrated, He rose from the dead as true God could only do. This wasn't the plan of man, but the plan of God, which the Holy Spirit of God works through, together with the waters of Holy Baptism, to create saving faith in us—faith in the Good News that God paid for our sins and raises us to new and eternal life through the death and resurrection of His Son.

Our spiritual birth as Children of God through faith in Jesus Christ is not the result of our natural head knowledge or decision any more than our physical birth is the result of our head knowledge or decision. Both our physical birth through our parents and our second spiritual birth through Baptism and God's Word are gifts from God, which means that we had nothing to do with them.

The same is true when it comes to our physical and spiritual growth. We rely on the gifts of God. And the gifts God gives us to grow and maintain both our physical and spiritual lives for all eternity is His Word and the Lord's Supper (through which He feeds us with the crucified and risen body and blood of Jesus Christ).

In the midst of all the plans Karen had for her life in this world, which God may at times have (in a loving, parental way) laughed at, Karen knew and believed in God's plan to maintain her physical and spiritual life through His means of grace. That's why she was not only regular in receiving God's most important gifts (His Word and Sacraments) in the Divine Service during the good times in her life but also during the bad times, when it's tempting to doubt that God's in control, working through all things to bring us to repentance and faith in Him, and keep us in the faith (Romans 8:28).

Thankfully, hours before Karen's death, I was able to share God's Word and Christ's body and blood with Karen through the Lord's Supper. And, by the grace of God, Gordon, Karen and me were able to say together Simeon's words from our Gospel reading, after also coming into physical contact with Jesus. *"Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel."*

May the Lord continue to give and strengthen that same faith in all of us, that we may, with Karen, be able to laugh with God together as we celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.