

"The Word of Our God Stands Forever"

Isaiah 40:1-8

15 December Anno Domini 1994
The Funeral of Emma Nachtigal

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

In Jesus Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem, the Crucified, Risen, and Ascended Savior of the world, dear members of Our Redeemer congregation, neighbors, and relatives of our departed sister in Christ, the members of the immediate family, and especially you, the sons of Mike and Emma Nachtigal:

The loss of a dear family member is never an easy event to endure. No matter what the age or the situation, it does seem as if we are never quite ready for that to happen, and yet, it does happen. For you here today - it is also difficult since you face an upcoming Christmas with Emma no longer here.

And so, at this time when you seek a word of comfort and hope, I simply direct you to the Holy Scriptures -- the Bible -- the Word of God. For the Gospel is the only thing that can give comfort and peace which can be trusted unto eternity. This Word of hope enables the tears of sorrow and grieving to be mixed with tears of joy and gladness. Therefore, listen to the words of the Holy Spirit as written by Isaiah in chapter 40, verses 1-8. Please listen to them and consider that ...

... The Word of Our God Stands Forever!

"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" says your God. "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth; the Glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." The voice said, "Cry out!" And he said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever."

Thus far the text.

The grass withers and the flower fades. At no time of the year are we reminded that this is true than the weather we are having right now. Not only has the grass withered and the flower faded, but they are covered with snow. Last August 1st we were here in the heat of the summer with grass quite green and many flowers blooming. It doesn't seem that long ago, does it? But autumn came and with it, flowers and leaves fall. The grass withered, became brown, and is now buried with the winter snows. The grass withers and the flower fades. Isaiah declares that surely the people are grass. All

flesh -- all humanity is like grass. Indeed, all of our earthy life is like the grass which eventually dies and is buried under the winter of death.

And on this day, we do not have to think very hard, nor look very far to be convinced of this -- for the mortal remains of one who was with us just a week ago is all the evidence that we need. Sometimes it is frightening to be reminded that the way of all flesh is as is before us this day. We can look and see. And yet, we do not view death like someone observing from a distance. Indeed, not, we are not spectators in life and in death -- rather, we are participants. And knowing that can bring terror to the heart and a sudden lump in the throat.

In the midst of such a condition, God, in His infinite mercy intervened. Just as we are not merely spectators, but participants; so also God Himself did not remain a spectator. His coming to be one of us is emphasized at Christmas with the Christ in the cradle. His journey to the cross in the first holy week, was to be as the Participant Who took our place under the wrath of God.

This all took place according to the Word of God's Promise first uttered in the Garden, repeatedly proclaimed by prophets, including Isaiah who wrote the Word of forgiveness in the One born of the virgin -- the Suffering Servant -- the Redeemer of the world. That Word of the Lord stands as God's firm pledge of hope in a fallen world -- a Rock of Refuge when the waters of life rise up to drown. All else may fall away -- health, family, friends, wealth, house, earthly security -- but the Word of God's Promise to you in Christ will never fail. God has declared it, and it is true, and He wants His Church -- His people -- He wants you to hear it.

Therefore, He states, *Comfort, yes, comfort My people! Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.* May you who are grieving the loss of Emma and hurting with sorrow, be assured that the Lord has called her unto Himself in eternal paradise. In Christ, the warfare between God and humanity is ended. God's people are pardoned, for in making the payment for the sins of the world, a double payment has been made. Isaiah wrote that the comforting message given to the Church to proclaim is that *she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.* In other words, God's forgiveness in Christ is greater than the sinfulness of man. That Word of hope stands forever. What comfort!

Years ago, Emma heard that Word which brought the Lord's forgiveness, eternal life and salvation to her. In her Baptism, God called her, brought her into His Kingdom, and said, *Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are mine.* She and Mike were married and raised their family, abiding in the Lord, and living under the Gospel. Being a Christian and living in Christ does not exempt us from the events of life and of death. It is true that, and, in spite of what one might have to endure.

It is true that *"All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades."* That is this life -- it is going to end -- each one of us is closer to death today than we were yesterday. As we grow older, we have all of the accompanying physical conditions which comes with old age. Hair gets thinner and greyer, instead of bouncing out of bed in the morning, we sit up, get our bearings, let our feet find the floor, and then take steps which are cautious. As life goes on, it may happen that we become so aged and infirmed that we can no longer get out of bed. And then comes death.

However, is that all there is? I mean, is this it? Indeed, not! In speaking of the Resurrection, Paul stated it this way, *If in this life only we ("WE" Christians) -- If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.* In other words, if this is it -- right here -- if this is it, Christians, then we are to be pitied the most. For if this is it, and a person lives for a year or so following a major stroke, and goes through the physical and mental anguish of physical therapy, and then must be brought into a worship service in a wheelchair, and hear these same words that you are hearing today for the funeral of her husband, and have a sudden attack which required emergency surgery, and then suffer a massive stroke and die several days later -- and that is it -- nothing more in Christ, what a sorry, pitiable situation. If that were the sum total of our existence in this world of sorrow and tears and hurt and pain and suffering and disappointment, then we are, of all people, to be pitied the most.

Indeed, if that were all there was, then there would be no comfort to be spoken. But thank God for His Word. Listen to it once more: *"The voice said, "Cry out!" And he said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever."*

What is that Word of our God that stands forever? Listen and be comforted by the Word of the Incarnate Word:

I Am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live. and whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.

Come unto Me, all ye that labor and I will give you rest.

Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Do you hear God's Word of Hope that stands forever? It is the promise that, for those who trust in Christ, death will have no dominion over them. The faithful are brought before the very Throne of God and will behold the Lamb of God, once slain and now living, and they will eat from the Tree of Life and will drink water from the river which flows from the Throne. God's Word, through Isaiah, is trustworthy and true. *The Word of our God stands forever.*

Is there such a word of comfort and consolation concerning Emma? Indeed, yes! The Good Shepherd called her His own and kept her throughout the rest of her life. Her faith was not allowed to be weakened or to turn to unbelief as she and Mike continued to live out their lives in the Family of God, coming to His House and being strengthened by the Holy Communion. And when she could no longer come to church, the church came to her with the Word.

A funeral is a worship service of the congregation which gathers to praise God for what He has done in the life of the deceased and to thank Him for what that faithful one is now enjoying in paradise. As a people congregate, we recognize that there may be some in our midst who are faithful and trusting in Christ. If you are one of these, then thank God and continue to stay close to Him and trust in Him Word which is able to carry you to heaven. Likewise, there may be some here who have

wandered away from the Lord over a period of years. In addition, there may be some who have never heard the Good News of God in Christ before. If you are one of these, who has drifted away from God or who has never known Christ, then do not let another moment go by without a heartfelt trust in the Lord.

For just as surely as we have come together here today, so also there will a group of people be gathered as they will remember each one of us, individually, as we will be called to present ourselves before God Almighty. In fact, with Emma's death, the Mike and Emma generation of Nachtigals from the Emmett area has stepped into eternity. The next generation, made up of their sons, has stepped forward to toe the line on this side of eternity.

When Emma was called, Jesus was with her and she was received into the bosom of her Lord. Don't enter eternity without knowing and trusting Jesus as Lord, Savior, and Redeemer. The Lord has worked the events out in the history of the world so that you would be here this day to hear His Word of hope and salvation and comfort. It is His opportunity for you to hear, perhaps for the last time, to hear the message of comfort and hope. He wants you to know that even though the grass withers and the flower fades,

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May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.