

# "Did You Get Marie's Message?"

## 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

April 30, 1998

Memorial Service for Marie Hereth

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

---

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear family members of Marie, friends, neighbors and members of the family of God here at Our Redeemer,

One of the ways of communicating a message to someone is to write them a letter. When He wanted to convey some truth or address some issue that needed clarification, God the Holy Spirit had some of the apostles write letters to people and to congregations. This was done with the intention that the recipient of the letter would get the message, would understand what it was about, and would make an appropriate response like rejoicing or repenting.

For example, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote a letter to the people of God at the ancient city of Thessalonica. Among other things, Paul desired to communicate a message to the people of God concerning Christians who had died. Some of the Thessalonians apparently thought that all believers in the Lord God would live until Christ's return. When some of the Christians died, questions surfaced and doubts began. Paul wanted to give the faithful Christians a word of comfort and so, he wrote a letter to them in order to communicate God's message about those faithful people who have fallen asleep in Christ.

On March 16, 1986, Marie was thinking about this day, although she did not know the exact date. She was thinking about what she message she wanted you to hear upon the occasion of her death and upon your being here in this service. You see, she had a message she wanted to convey to you and she wanted you to listen carefully - to be just as careful in listening as she was in selecting the Bible text for today's sermon. She chose 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Please listen to that portion of the Bible and hopefully, you will be able to answer the question ...

... *Did You Get Marie's Message?*

*But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not*

*precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

The first thing we notice about this text that Marie selected for you to hear this day is that God does not want people to be ignorant or unknowing about those who have fallen asleep -- those Christians who have died in Christ. The reason? Well, God does not want you to grieve the way others do whose relatives and loved ones die without Christ. Those who die in such a state of unbelief have no hope, and those who grieve for them don't have any hope during their grieving process. That is not the situation with Marie. Those of you who mourn her falling asleep in Christ do not have to *grieve as others do who have no hope.*

Why is there hope for you who grieve Marie's passing? Well, it's not because of what Marie has done. It's because of what God in Christ has done. Without Jesus' coming into this world in Bethlehem and without Him living a perfect life and without Him suffering God's wrath for the sins of the world (Marie's sins, your sins, and mine as well) and without Him dying in our place on the cross and without Him rising from the dead on Easter morning and without Him ascending into heaven to prepare a place for us, there would be no hope for Marie or for anyone else. The blessings of God in Christ have been earned for everyone.

The second thing we notice about this text that Marie wanted for today is that there are two different groups of people -- those people who have hope and those people who have no hope. The difference is faith in Christ which is believed in the heart, confessed with the mouth, and lived out in life. The promises of God are the same for all people, but not all people believe in them. That is why the Apostles' Creed which was confessed earlier begins with two words, "I believe."

Of course, believing is more than just saying the words. It is living the faith out in life. Permit me to give you an example of what I mean. Marie was baptized on July 1st, 1900 and at that time God worked faith in her heart. She was confirmed on April 5th, 1914 and on that day she added her personal, "I believe" to the Apostles' Creed. But that didn't mean she stopped serving the Lord God or going to church. She continued to be in the worship services to hear the Word of God and make applications to her life. That continued until she was no longer able to come to church. At that time the church came to her with the services on video-tape. When she went into the rest home, the church came to her again with visits from members and with private communion. She desired the Lord's Supper and received it because God had given her faith. You see, Marie was of the group of people who have hope. *For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.*

Fallen asleep. It's such a beautiful term to describe the death of a Christian and particularly the way Marie died. She fell asleep in Christ. In a few minutes we will be singing the last stanza of the hymn that she chose for today. The entire hymn is in the form of a prayer. Picture Marie on her deathbed as you listen to the beautiful words of that last stanza now, as well as when you sing it later.

*Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes,*

*Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.*

*Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;*

*In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!*

When Paul wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica, he wanted them to know that some Christians would fall asleep in Christ before the Lord would return. Not all Christians would live until the end of the world. No one knows when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. The majority of Christians will fall asleep in Christ before Jesus returns. Some will be alive when He comes. Or, as the Bible states it. *For this we declare to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.*

This speaks of the Resurrection. After Jesus paid for all your sins when He was crucified and after He died for you, His Body was taken down from the cross and placed into a grave - into a tomb. Three days later, He rose from the dead. The devil had been defeated. Sin has been paid for. Death has been conquered. The death and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, is a message of the truth that one may live with and one may die with. Jesus said that because He lives you also shall live (John 14:19).

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.*

These words from this text that Marie chose for us remind us of another truth; that there will be a family reunion in heaven. However, it won't be the limited reunion of a particular nation or an individual group and private family. The family reunion in heaven will be the Family of God. The family of God is made up of all people regardless of social status, ethnicity, age, sex or nationality - red and yellow, black and white. The family of God is made up of all people of all generations who have been brought to faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God and who live and die believing and trusting that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Marie learned it from the *Small Catechism* that confesses that God the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will at the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true." *Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

The Apostle John describes the Church -- this Family of God ... *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10). Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

Dear people, a funeral has some similarities to a family reunion. Many family members from four or five generations suddenly arrive a place and talk about days gone by. There is the seeing of faces not seen for years, perhaps decades. There might be cousins ... second, third, and one-removed who

wouldn't recognize one another if they met one the street. Most family member have to come back here to Emmett ... to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church ... on a day like this. In fact, on the membership roster of Our Redeemer, there are only two of Marie's descendants left. Most family members have move away from Emmett and the immediate area. Perhaps ... perhaps some of you (family members, friends, or neighbors) have fallen away from the Lord and His Church. If so, you are welcomed back ... welcomed back physically and hopefully, welcomed back spiritually.

Please listen, you are here today and Marie was looking forward to your being here. She had this day in mind for a long time. She picked the hymns, the readings, and this sermon text for you. This evening, and later on in the next few days, pick up that Bible you have at home. Find and concentrate on the readings that Marie chose for you. Thus, we end this sermon with a question for each one of us to consider, personally and individually -- to consider today and in the up-coming days as you think on all that you have seen and heard. The question is this ...

... *Did You Get Marie's Message?*