

*"It's Not Just Faith, but Faith in Christ Jesus"*

John 3:16

**Velma Gunter Funeral Sermon**

14 October Anno Domini 2003

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Dear Members of Velma's Family, her friends, neighbors and the members of the Church as it is manifested here at Our Redeemer,

One can serve and help in many ways, but it is never easy to stand by as a loved one - mother, sister, grandmother - is slowly consumed by cancer. What makes such a vigil somewhat bearable is when the one who is dying is at peace with the departing from this life. This was the situation with Velma for, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God, she knew and trusted in the Son of God sent by our heavenly Father. In other words, Velma believed in the Savior of the world - Jesus Christ.

So at ease was she with her departure from this life, and so confident was she in the place where the LORD God was going to take her, that she spoke about this funeral service. She wanted you to sing "How Great Thou Art" and "Abide with Me." Both are hymns of prayer wherein one commends oneself into the gracious, nail-pierced hands of our Redeemer. Ponder, for example, one of those prayers in the hymn-stanza where the singer prays to Jesus ...

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!

Even as the cross was being held before her closing eyes, Velma talked about this service when you would be here. When asked if there was a specific Bible passage she wanted as the basis for her funeral sermon, she indicated that she wanted it based on John 3:16. Therefore, please listen to that text and consider how it applied to Velma and how it applies to you, doing so under the theme of ...

... "It's Not Just Faith, but Faith in Christ Jesus"

For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Since Velma wanted you to hear a sermon based on this Word of God, let us ponder it, section by section. We begin with the first phrase.

For God so loved the world. We wonder why. Why would God love this world? It's a world that is fallen from God's perfect creation ... a world that has turned its back on God and really doesn't think it has have much use for Him ... a world that has thumbed its nose at God and gone its own way. Thus this is a world of pain and suffering and death, not just of the body but also the soul. Behold this world and each one of us on it - each of us, and all of us, huddled together on this planet that is dying due to the disease of sin.

So when the Bible says that God so loved the world it is not a statement made because the world is so loveable. Indeed, this world is not. Indeed, no one is - not you, not me, not Velma. She knew that she was a sinner; someone who was sinful and who transgressed God's Ten Commandments in deed, in word, in thought; by what she did and by what she didn't do - by what she said and didn't say - by what she thought and didn't think.

God so loved the world is a declaration, not about us for it is not about our loveable-ness, but it is about God alone Who is love. His love is for this world, and though God hates sin, He would not have the world, He would not have Velma, He would not have you enter eternity without providing the way to be with Him in heaven. This would not be ordinary love that would be able to provide it. It would not be brotherly love or friendly love or romantic love or emotional love. It would be sacrificial love.

For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son. Thus God gave His only Son ... the Father's Son from eternity He gave Him ... sent Him into this world. That's what Christmas is all about. Jesus, Son of the Father from eternity and born of the virgin Mary, is the Savior come to this world and drawing His first breath in Bethlehem. He came as a baby to be the Savior of babies. Jesus was a child and youth growing up in Galilee in the house of Joseph and Mary, doing so in order to be the Savior of children and youth. Jesus became an adult in order to be the Savior of adults.

Thus God the Father so loved the world that He gave God the Son to be born, to live and to be the Sacrifice that paid the price for all sins of all people of all times. This Jesus did when He suffered the awful price of the world's sin - the awful price of Velma's sins - the awful price of your sins, on the cross when He was crucified. Thus Jesus so loved you that He gave His Life for you. He poured out His holy, precious Blood to wash away all your wretched filth and cleanse your soul. Jesus took your sins upon Himself so that you might have His complete forgiveness covering you. He took your death to give You His Life - everlasting life now, eternal life forever. That's what Good Friday is all about. God died for the world, God died for Velma, God died for you. God so loved the world that He gave.

Three days later, Jesus, the Son of God, rose again from the dead. On the cross He had conquered sin and Satan. From the tomb where His Body had been placed, Jesus rose again on that Resurrection morning nearly two thousand years ago. In doing so, He conquered death and the grave. That's what Easter Sunday is all about. That is what Velma believed and she could commend herself - her body and soul and all things into the nail-pierced hands of the risen Jesus, doing so with peace and joyful anticipation of Paradise. In these last weeks she knew that she would be alive with the Lord while the cancer would be dead and gone. That's what she wanted you to hear this morning and thus we continue with the text that she chose.

For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him. And

right here is where people often get messed up. They think that God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whoever believes ... shall not perish but have everlasting life. That is a lie. People will say, or perhaps you yourself have said, "Don't worry, I believe. I'm okay because I've got faith." Listen again to what the Bible states, For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life. ... that whoever believes in Him, ... believes in Him ... in Him ... in Christ Jesus.

So please understand, it is not just faith, but faith in Christ Jesus that leads to Paradise. Jesus said it in the Gospel Reading that you heard earlier when He declared, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). If you notice in the Apostles' Creed that the Church confessed a few moments ago, it is not "I believe, period," but "I believe in God the Father Almighty ... in Jesus Christ ... in the Holy Ghost."

Others will claim, "It's doesn't matter what you believe, just so long as you're sincere." Again, dearly beloved, that is a sincere lie that ends in eternal destruction. Concerning the Lord Jesus, the Bible states the truth that, "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). So it's not just "faith," but "faith in Jesus" that saves and gives comfort even if one is riddled with tumors and on her deathbed. Thus Velma's faith in Christ, especially in these last few weeks, may make us feel better but that does not give us faith in Christ. Only God the Holy Spirit can do that by graciously working through the Word.

Godly, faithful parents want that for their children and they will make certain that their babies are brought to the Lord in order for Him to give such little ones faith in Christ. Thus, shortly after Velma was born in 1923, her loving parents cared, not only for her bodily needs, but also for her soul and she was baptized in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. At that instant of water and the Word, God worked faith in her tiny heart to believe in Christ. Surely that is what God wanted for her and for the world. It's what Godly parents want for their babies. So please accept this invitation, if you have not already done so, to grant the gift of faith in Christ Jesus to your babies, or even to you, that you may be among the dear baptized. You may curse the Truth, or you may repent and ask, as a certain man in the Bible did when he heard about the Savior and the blessings of Baptism. He said, "See! Here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized" (Acts 8:37)? Truly "the promise is to you and to your children" (Acts 2:39).

Godly parents want all the blessings of God in Christ to be for them and for their children. This was true for Velma and thus, she was brought up in the Christian faith, being brought to Sunday School and to the Church services where she heard about God's Law which condemns sin and God's Gospel which forgives. For faith in Christ to continue, one must nourish the soul. There is a spiritual starvation that Velma was not permitted to suffer. Growing in faith in Christ Jesus is what God wants for children. So please accept this invitation, if you are not already doing so, to bring your children to Sunday School and to Church, every Sunday, week after week, year after year, that they may be among the dear baptized who hear God's Word applied to them. It will be of immense help and comfort when they are in the position that Velma was in this last year of her life on this earth.

Velma continued to grow in her knowledge of and trust in Christ Jesus. In 1936 she confirmed the Christian faith and was received at the Lord's Table partaking of the Holy Meal wherein Jesus said, "Take and eat; this is My Body. This is My Blood of the new Testament which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28). Throughout the years she continued to be in the Divine Service on Sunday mornings at Church and to hear the Word of God and to receive Christ

in the Holy Communion. Since March of 1998, the Holy Supper was the time and the place when she was closest to her husband, Ernie - he at the Table of the Lord in Paradise there - she feasting at the same on this side of eternity here. At every visit in these last few months she desired to confess her sins, to hear the announcement of God's forgiveness and to receive the Lord's Supper. This is what sustained her faith in Christ Jesus up to and through that moment last Friday when she was called from this world. Now she and Ernie, along with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven laud and magnify the glorious Name of the LORD, evermore praising Him and singing,

"Holy, Holy, Holy, LORD God of Sabaoth;  
Heav'n and earth are full of Thy glory."

"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 7:9-11).

Now she and Ernie, along with the angels and archangels and all the white-robed host of heaven laud and magnify the glorious Name of the LORD, evermore praising Him and singing,

"Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest!"

Therefore please accept this invitation, if you are not already doing so, to prepare yourself for the On-Going Feast. Please speak with me about becoming a member here at Our Redeemer and attending the Supper of the Lord Jesus where Ernie and Velma are already seated and feasting.

Dear Members of Velma's Family, her friends, neighbors and the members of the Church as it is manifested here at Our Redeemer,

Remember today, and every day, and for your last day in this life, it's ...

"It's Not Just *Faith*, but *Faith in Christ Jesus*."

This is what Velma wanted you to hear this day: God so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life. Amen. What Velma wanted you to sing this day is the hymn "Abide with Me." It's hymn #552 in the hymnal. We will sing stanzas 1, 2, 6, 7, and 8.