

## "What Are You Waiting For?"

### Psalm 130:5

+ Bertha Ackermann +

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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 Olinda, Pauline, members of Bertha's family, her friends, neighbors, and members of Good Shepherd and Our Redeemer congregations,

Though we did not know the exact day when her heart would beat its last on this earth, or when her final breath of this terrestrial air would be breathed, we all basically knew that last Wednesday was coming. Bertha knew the moment was coming as well. She waited for that specific instant and, indeed, she had been waiting for that particular second of time since God gave her the gift of faith on June 15, 1912 when she was baptized in Kazakhstan.

But what was Bertha waiting for? Well, ponder for a moment what she was not waiting for ... Bertha was not waiting for death. To wait for death is terrifying and there was no indication at all that Bertha was the least bit terrified. To wait for the increasing darkness, as even one's eyes gradually dim to death, is absolutely frightening; yet Bertha was far from being afraid and could rather, close her eyes in peace. The reason? The answer is that Bertha was not waiting for death and this makes all the difference in life, both for the number of days that you have left in the world, and especially in eternity where the days are without number.

And when I say "you," I really mean "you," for neither a funeral service nor a funeral sermon is for the one who is now with the Lord as Bertha is. Rather these are all for you. Therefore, this afternoon, on the basis of God's Word, in particular, a single verse from Psalm 130, please ponder your answer to the question ...

... "What Are You Waiting For?"

"I wait for the LORD; my soul doth wait; and in His Word do I hope."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

What are you waiting for? Now, this question seeks not for the answer of the minor waitings in life ... like waiting for a traffic light to turn green, or for a prescription at the pharmacy, or for the workday to be done, or for the joy of Christmas, or even for the end of a funeral sermon. "What are you waiting for" is not even about the bigger issues in life ... like waiting for the biopsy report from that tumor, or for the deciding word from your fiancée, or waiting for a cattle car in Budapest, or waiting for the blessed birth of a child. "What are you waiting for" is about the biggie ... about eternity.

In other words, are you waiting for the LORD or are you waiting for death? That question cuts to the quick and puts aside all the fine trappings we hang on our day to day routine. Everything boils down to those two ... the LORD or death. Which of these are you waiting for?

That question wisps across our minds on good days and confronts you on a day like this when there are sixty bodies in this room but only fifty-nine souls. For you see Bertha answered it like this: "I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait; and in His Word do I hope." Thus last Wednesday Bertha departed this world and was with the Lord Jesus in Paradise. She was waiting for the LORD God.

But what are you waiting for? There are many responses to that question that ultimately lead, not to the LORD, but to death. The atheist will preach, "I wait for nothing, my soul doesn't wait, and I have no hope." The result is death. Listen to what one atheist, a famous American named Thomas Paine, said on his deathbed: "O God, what have I done to suffer so much? But there is no God! But if there should be, what will become of me hereafter?" That's a man waiting for death. Contrast that with the quiet spirit and peaceful mind that Bertha had as she heard the hymning of "Lord, Take Thy Hand and Lead Me." Bertha was a woman waiting for the Lord.

The agnostic will say, "I'm not sure I'm waiting for anything, my soul's not sure, and I'm not certain I have any hope." The result is death. And consider the man who's trying to be good enough so that he can earn Paradise. With his intentions and actions, he says, "I wait for heaven, my soul doth wait; and in my good deeds do I hope." The result? Death. For one of the requirements to earn a place in heaven is that you must be absolutely and totally perfect in every thought, each word and all deeds for your entire life, from the moment of your conception to your soul separates from your body for nothing unclean can come into God Presence. Likewise your good deeds will not save you ... neither will your good intentions. If you place your hope in your decision you are lost. If your hope is based on your emotions or feelings, your penance or practice, your reason or strength, your ethnicity or vocation then likewise, you are simply waiting for death.

This is not what Bertha did. Rather, even though she was a sinner and had broken God's Law countless times, she was given the gift of faith to trust God, namely, the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. In other words, she would say with the psalmist, "I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait; and in His Word do I hope."

The psalmist's hope was based on God's Word of promise; of the Savior Who would defeat the devil (Genesis 3:15); of the Redeemer Who would defeat death by dying and rising again from the dead and raising His own from the dead (Job 19:25-27); of the Prophet Whom God would raise up among His people in order that they would listen to His Word (Deut. 18:15); of the High Priest Who gave Himself on the Day of Atonement and is enthroned in heaven forever (Psalm 110:4); of the King Who reigns with forever with His grace, mercy and peace, and Who gives forgiveness of sins, grants eternal life and bestow salvation.

Bertha's hope was based on the Word of God's promise and this is what she confessed on April 30, 1926 when she confirmed the Christian faith as in the words of the Apostles' Creed that was confessed a few moments ago. She believed God's Good News and in His Word did she continue to hope. What Word? Ones like these, so please ...

... listen to the Word of God spoken by the prophet, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14);

+ and behold, the faithful wait and sing,

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel;  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear,  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel" (TLH #62).

... listen to the Word of God spoken by the angel "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a Son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21);

+ and behold, the church sings,

"Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes,  
The Savior promised long;  
Let ev'ry heart prepare a throne  
And ev'ry voice a song" (TLH #66).

... listen to the Word of God proclaimed by the heavenly messenger "Fear not; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

+ and behold, the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven burst into song,

Glory to God in the highest!

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room  
And heav'n and nature sing,  
And heav'n and nature sing,  
And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing" (TLH #87)

... listen to the Word of God when the Son petitions His Father from the cross when Jesus was crucified for you, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

+ and hear the Lenten hymning,

"Abel's blood for vengeance, Pleaded to the skies;  
But the Blood of Jesus, For our pardon cries" (TLH #158).

... listen to the Word of God when He declared in the darkness when all of your sins had been paid for and when your salvation had been accomplished; that is, when Jesus proclaimed in victory, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

+ and hear the little congregation sing at the foot of the cross

"Ye who think of sin but lightly  
Nor suppose the evil great  
Here may view its nature rightly,  
Here its guilt may estimate.  
Mark the Sacrifice appointed,  
See Who bears the awful load;  
'Tis the WORD, the LORD'S ANOINTED,  
Son of Man and Son of God" (TLH #153).

... listen to the Word of God when the Risen Redeemer said to one of His disciples who was grieving. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" (John 20:15).

+ and hear the one who grieves, but not like those that have no hope, as that one sings in Easter triumph and Easter joy ...

"I know that my Redeemer lives;  
What comfort this sweet sentence gives!  
He lives, He lives, Who once was dead;  
He lives, my ever-living Head" (TLH #200)

... listen to the Word of God when Jesus invited, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 1:28).

+ and hear a lone voice reply in song,

"Lord, take my hand and lead me, Upon life's way  
Direct, protect, and feed me, From day to day.  
Without Your grace and favor, I go astray;  
So take my hand, O Savior, and lead the way" (LW 512).

... listen to the Word of God when the Christ said, "In My Father's House are many mansions; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

+ and hear the faithful pray for self and for the Family of God,

"Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word;  
Curb those who fain by craft and sword,  
Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son  
And set at naught all He hath done" (TLH #261)

... listen to the Ascending Jesus promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

+ and hear the song of Jesus' little lamb,

"Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death  
I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me" (Psalm 23:4).

... listen to the Crucified, Risen and Heavenly Enthroned Son of God encourage His own with His Word, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the Crown of Life" (Revelation 2:10).

+ and hear a single sentence sighed in faith ...

"I wait for the LORD; my soul doth wait; and in His Word do I hope."

What are you waiting for? Dear friend, that is not a call to action. It's a call to listen and to hear that you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit, for "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Dearly beloved, we conclude with a prayer written by a German servant of the Word, Pastor Martin Moller, who lived from 1547 to 1606. We pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, open Thou mine heart through Thy Holy Spirit, that I may gladly hear the sayings of Thy Holy Word, note them well, repeat them often, and enrich my heart with them. Grant that I may keep Thy Word, and not be like a pot that leaks and can retain no doctrine. Open Thou mine understanding, strengthen my memory, and remind me unceasingly of Thy comfort. Help me to retain Thy Word in a sincere, good heart, and bring forth fruit in patience unto eternal salvation. Amen.