

In Memoriam
† Delda Ash †
John 14:1-12
October 28, 2005
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls

I. Troubled Disciples

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.” So said the Son of God to His disciples. The tension in the air was palpable at this special, Last Supper. The mood was crazy-somber because death was near. Over the past weeks and months, the Lord had told them time and time again that He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified; now the betrayal was underway and His alarming prophecy would be fulfilled within 24 hours. So what would the eleven do? As long as Jesus was with them, they were disciples of the Christ, the Son of the Living God. But if He were dead, what were they, then? A ragtag band of fishermen and others, with no real leader and nowhere to go. They were absolutely nothing without Him but lost sheep, with no hope and waiting to die. They could look back at the good times for a bit of solace, but that promised them no help for the future.

So Jesus said, “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. And where I go you know, and the way you know.”

But did they? Did they know the way? Their Savior was leaving via the grave. How would they be united again? Thomas said, “Lord we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way?” What sort of path led from life, through death, to beyond? What would they have to do to get there?

Jesus replied, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

They needed to know Jesus, and that was all. Why? Because when it came to their salvation, He was going to do all the saving. They didn’t have to find some way to raise themselves from the dead, because—after He died and rose—Jesus was going to come back to raise them Himself. They didn’t need to seek out some sort of hidden knowledge, because Jesus stood before them to tell them the truth that He would die for their sins and rise from the dead. They didn’t need to find some hidden life source, some fountain of youth somewhere, because the risen Jesus would give them life. By His death on the cross, He would deliver them from sin. By His resurrection from the grave, He would deliver them from death. He was preparing the mansions for them in heaven forever.

He was the Way, the Truth and the Life for them; and He would keep His promises. No wonder He said to them, “Let not your heart be troubled.”

Of course, as long as the disciples lived in this sinful world, they'd still be troubled. While Jesus underwent trial and cross, they'd flee, hide, deny and despair. They knew the way, the truth and the life because they believed in Jesus; but their eyes saw terrible things that filled them with fear. No matter their fearful doubt, though: Jesus rose three days later: He made His way to them, spoke His truth to them to forgive them and give them life. He sent them out to tell the world that He was the Way to His Father and heaven. Of those apostles, all would die—and all but one a martyr's death. Even then, however, salvation was sure and the hope was certain. When bodies were wracked by pain, hearts were still not troubled. They knew Jesus because Jesus knew them. By His death and resurrection, He had prepared a place for them. Forever.

II. St. Delda

“Let not your heart be troubled,” said Jesus once again. This time, He said it to a little girl named Delda. “You believe in God, and you believe in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; and by My death and resurrection, I have prepared a place for you.” Yes, make no mistake: Jesus said this specifically to Delda, on July 11, 1920 at Trinity Lutheran Church in Sabin, Minnesota. He used different words—namely, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” They were spoken over Delda before she was old enough to comprehend the words; but on that day, the promise to her was sure. Jesus declared that when He had died on the cross for the sins of all the world, He had died for the sins of Delda. He had already suffered God's judgment for her and risen again; and now in Baptism He shared that death and resurrection with her. That day, the Lord said, “Delda, you don't know all that I have planned for you. No one does but Me. But this you know, because I declare it to all this day: I have already given you forgiveness and faith and eternal life. Your soul already lives in Me forever. No matter what lies ahead, rest assured that you know the end of the story. By My life and death and resurrection, I have prepared a place for you in heaven. Let not your heart be troubled.”

And having begun this good work in His beloved child, the Lord Jesus remained faithful to her. So Delda's life in the Lord's hands continued, and He provided her with all sorts of gifts—including a young sergeant named John, then a son, then grandkids and great-grandkids to boot. There would be days when Christ's blessings were richly apparent, and days when there was little but anxiety and trouble and doubt. But day after day, year after year, Christ attended her by His Word, to give her more grace and strengthen her faith. Time and time again, He spoke His Gospel into her ear: “Delda, I have made you My own and I forgive you for all of your sins. There will be both trials and joys for you, but you can be sure that my mercies are new for you every morning. My faithfulness to you is sure, and I will be your portion now and forever. Let not your heart be troubled. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life for you.”

So the years went on, the Lord faithful to His promises for His beloved child. But this is a sinful world, and time and age wear away at body and health. Disease and distress proclaim the wages of sin in a way more piercing than any sermon ever could. And as it happens to all in this life, so it happened to Delda. She attended John during his prolonged failing health, and grieved his death three and a half years ago; though she did not mourn without hope, for the Lord had made John His beloved child, too. The time since was relatively free of serious health problems, but death comes to all. It hit, and hit fast and hard. The diagnosis of ovarian cancer came just a few weeks ago, and so we are here today. But as He had for so long, the Lord did not forsake Delda. Even as foes like grief and age, sickness and death circled her and sought to rob her of life and hope, Jesus remained

faithful. Despite the presence of these enemies—indeed, because of them, He continued to prepare a banquet Supper for Delda. He continued to say to her, “Take and eat, this is My body. Take and drink, this is My blood...for the forgiveness of sins.” By this gift of Holy Communion, the Lord said to her once again, “Let not your heart be troubled. Even though you must walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I have gone there before you and destroyed its power. I will be with you now, and I will raise you up to everlasting life.”

The Lord always keeps His promises; that is why, although you mourn today, you do not mourn without hope. Christ has died for all the world and Christ is risen from the dead. Risen from the dead, He promises forgiveness to all who repent of their sin and believe in Him. He promised this to Delda. He promises it to you.

And so He declares to you this day, “Let not your heart be troubled.” In His Father’s house are many mansions: as He did for Delda, by His death and resurrection He has prepared a place for you. Christ Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life: knowing Him, you know the way to heaven. Forgiven for His sake, heaven is already yours.

We do not see heaven with our eyes, only by faith. For now, our eyes see the enemies of grief and age, sickness and death. By faith, though, we see what St. John saw in Revelation 21: I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:2-5).

That holy city in Revelation 21 is the Church, the Bride of Christ—the sum total of all of God’s people in the history of the world. Throughout history, we see the Church move on, often troubled and worn and ailing. But throughout history, she lives on because her Savior is always with her. The Church doesn’t look especially triumphant in this world: but in that vision of heaven, John sees her in her glory forever, set free from sin and sorrow and crying and pain.

What is true for the sum total of believers is also true for each individual believer. Gathered here today, you mourn the death of Delda Ash, and you witnessed some of the griefs that she endured. But for the sake of Jesus, her Savior, for her there is no more death, nor sorrow nor crying. There is no more pain, for these are former things that have passed away. God has wiped every tear from her eye and made all things new for her.

That is the promise fulfilled for Delda Ash. That is the certain hope by which you live this day. Let not your heart be troubled.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen