

30 January 2020  
Funeral Service for Althea Kekker

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“A Life Worth Celebrating: Jesus’ ”

Text: Isaiah 43:1-3; Revelation 12:7-12; Luke 23:33-43

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

It has become fashionable these days to call what we are doing here today not a funeral, but a celebration of life. And by that it is meant a life well-lived but now ended.

Christian funerals are not that. We can call this a celebration of life, and maybe we should. But in this sense: this is a celebration of a life which has not ended, but that goes on. And will go on forever. Because while we *remember* Althea today, we *celebrate* Christ and His life. And especially His life given for us on the cross, that by His death and resurrection the enemy named death which stalks us all is vanquished.

Last Tuesday, in the wee hours of the morning, it looked like Althea had been vanquished. That death had won. Again. Her body had finally given in. It could take no more. But while that’s what it looked like, the reality was actually quite different. For death is not the end for those who live in Jesus.

For the fight for Althea’s life had actually been finished a long time ago. And not in a bed on the second floor of Silverado in Alexandria, but on a hill called Calvary. Or as we heard today, ***the place that was called The Skull***. The fight taken up by Jesus not for His own life, but for Althea’s, for yours, for mine, for every person. So that we, who like those criminals crucified with Him are under a sentence of condemnation, might *instead* of condemnation hear these words: ***Father, forgive them***, and, ***Today, you will be with me in Paradise***. That “today” for Althea was last Tuesday.

And that “today” for her will now never end. Because there is now nothing to condemn Althea. All her sins that would have condemned her were taken by her Saviour Jesus. He put them on His shoulders and was condemned for them in her place. So what charge can now be brought against Althea? Nothing. Her sins forgiven, her death vanquished, there is now for her only life. Life eternal.

Of course, satan doesn’t want you to know that, or remember it, or worst of all *believe* it. The one who was cast out of heaven and down to the earth, full of wrath, will do his best to pull you away from that life. He’ll show you your sins, remind you of your sins, magnify your sins, condemn you for your sins. He’ll show you death and all the ugliness of death and the strength of death and the enormity of death and the finality of death. And

he'll show you weak, puny little you. Loser you. Unworthy you. Lost you. Celebrate the past, he'll say, 'cause that's all you have.

But he's wrong. Because as Isaiah told us today, *when you pass through the waters, when you walk through the fire, you will not be overwhelmed, you will not be burned*, because you are not alone. *The Holy One of Israel, your Saviour*, is with you. And it is His strength, not yours, that will see you through. His victory, not yours, that will win. His victory given to Althea on November 26, 1920 when she was baptized into Christ. On that day, and ever since that day, she had all the promises of God, all the strength of her Saviour, all His forgiveness and life. So that 99 years, one month, and 25 days later, at 2:38 in the morning, she would die a blessed death and enter into life with her Lord Jesus.

That's something worth celebrating! A life worth celebrating. Not a life now done, but a life just beginning.

A life that I know Althea was looking forward to. Especially for the past seven years she had to live without her dear Michael. The service that we're using today, the readings and hymns, are the exact same as for him. She wanted it to be so. If she were here today, she might not remember that, but she would be pleased.

Another thing that would please her is that I'm not really talking about her very much - what she did, her life and accomplishments. She didn't really like attention. I found that out a little over 9 years ago when her and Mike's 60th wedding anniversary was coming up. I thought: Wow! 60 years! That's something worth celebrating. And I wanted to have a special reception and celebration for them after church that Sunday. But Mike and Althea told me: if you're going to do that, we're not coming to church that Sunday. So I relented.

But I think Althea will be okay with receiving the crown of life from her Saviour.

Her body soon will be laid to rest, to await the day of the resurrection of all flesh. That day when there will be no more broken hips, no more broken memories - just the day when all the promises of God to her will be finally and fully fulfilled. One of her favorite hymns was *Crown Him with Many Crowns*. But on that day, *she'll* be the one receiving the crown of life. From Jesus. The Jesus she is even now with. The Jesus she will be with forever.

I am grateful that just a couple of days before Althea fell and broke her hip and entered her last days, I was able to visit with her and have the Lord's Supper with her. We sat at one of the little tables in the art area near her room by ourselves. But we were not by ourselves. For where the Body and Blood of Jesus are, there are the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Even there, in a memory care. The same

angels who came for Althea and carried her home on Tuesday morning.

That's the life we celebrate this day. The life of Christ poured out upon Althea in Holy Baptism, put into Althea in Holy Communion, and strengthened in Althea in Holy Absolution - the life Althea now enjoys. Her Saviour's gift to her.

And maybe one final thought . . . Michael and I would sometimes joke about the different mansions there would be in heaven - the Lutheran mansion, the Anglican mansion, and such, and what they would be like. I'm sure Althea saw a lot of mansions in her travels to England and Scotland over the years. But the one she will now have surpasses them all. A mansion, in fact, I'm sure, even greater than her beloved Downton Abbey.

Thank You Jesus, for such great and precious promises. Thank You for Your life given *for* us. Thank You for Your life given *to* us. And thank You for the life You gave to Althea, for the blessing she was to us and to so many, and for the eternal life she has now begun. Keep us all strong in this same faith, that when our Saviour comes again in glory, we see Him - and Althea, again - face-to-face.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.