

1 February 2013
Funeral of Dorothea Eckert

Christ the King Lutheran Church
Grosse Point, MI

Jesu Juva

“I Shall not Die, but I Shall Live”

Text: Jeremiah 29:11-14; John 14:1-6; 2 Cor. 4:7; 5:1-8

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

Dear family and friends . . .

The psalmist said: ***I shall not die, but I shall live*** (Ps 118:17a).

Some may think those strange words to say at a funeral, but they are today our hope in the midst of sorrow, our joy in the midst of sadness. For Oma is not dead, but alive. Yes, her body is here. But she was never more alive than she is now, having received that abundant life of which Jesus spoke when He said: ***I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*** (John 10:10). Jesus promised Dorothea that life some 98 years ago when He baptized a little one-month-old girl, gave her His Spirit, and said *you are mine*. And He kept her in the faith of that life, though sin, struggle, disease, and death did its worst to take it away.

But no, Jesus said. ***I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*** (John 10:28). And the Good Shepherd, through His Word of life and His life-giving Body and Blood, kept that promise, protecting her, keeping her, and sustaining her ever stronger, even as her body grew weaker. Until on Sunday morning, the day of our Lord's resurrection and victory over death and the grave, our Lord took His little girl home. She was our mother, grandmother, and Oma, but she was always His little girl. Yes, that's why we can rejoice and say with the psalmist today: ***I shall not die, but I shall live***. For because of our Saviour Jesus Christ, we do not live lives that end in death; we die deaths that end in life.

We're in the midst of the Epiphany season in our church, which is a season in which we hear that *things are not as they appear*. Magi bow down and worship a child. The water of purification at the wedding in Cana is changed into the best wine. For where Jesus is, there is always more going on than meets the eye. Where Jesus is, there is life going on, there is salvation going on. We may not see it. We may see only death and so our eyes fill with tears and our hearts ache. But when our eyes are filled with sorrow Jesus fills our ears with hope. And so Jesus says to us today: ***Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me*** (John 14:1). Believe. Believe, like the Magi, what you cannot see. Believe, like at Cana, that our Lord has come to bring us joy and gladness at *His* wedding feast that has

no end. Believe, that where our Lord is, there is good.

That is the message not only for us today, but for God's people of all time. It was the message of the prophet Jeremiah, who we heard from today, to God's people in exile in Babylon. A strange city in a strange land with a strange culture, strange people, a strange language, strange food, strange customs, and strange gods. 70 years they had to stay there, God said. 70 years. So build houses, plant gardens, marry and have children, He said. Do good to the people there, and pray for them. Be my blessing to them even as I discipline you. Until the 70 years are up. And then, God says, I will bring you back. I will fulfill my promise and bring you home. ***For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.***

Like us today, they couldn't see that. What they saw *looked* really bad. But the Word of God in their ears gave them hope and gave them faith. That even in Babylon, God was working good, fulfilling his plans for them - His loving plans for them.

Well not 70, but 98 years is what God decreed for Oma. And through it all, her Lord, her Saviour, was working good for her, whether it seemed it or not. Through many ups and downs. When her dear Emil was taken from her, when age made it too hard to keep her house filled with memories and she had to move to the American House. But she made there her home, doing good to the people there and praying for them. God's blessing to *them* until her almost 99 years were up, and it was time for the Lord to fulfill His promise to her, come to her, and take her home. ***For I know the plans I have for you, Dorothea, declares the Lord.*** Surprises to us maybe; but not to Him.

There's a great difference, however, between Israel returning home and Oma going home. Israel returned to nothing. When the Babylonians conquered the people of Judah they looted, destroyed, and burned the Temple, knocked down the walls around Jerusalem and reduced the entire city to rubble. It was not a pretty sight. But we heard something quite different about our future, in the reading today from John. For there Jesus said: ***In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if 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.*** You see, our home, our promised land, is no place of rubble and destruction, but of glory! A place specially prepared for *us* by Jesus. For He goes ahead of us to prepare everything for us. That all be ready.

And where Jesus went to do that is the cross. For Jesus spoke these words *mere hours* before His arrest and crucifixion. On the cross is where the Temple of God - His Temple not of stone, but of flesh and bone - would be destroyed. On the cross,

sin, satan, and death would have at Him, doing their worst, trying to destroy once and for all the Temple of God and the city of God. That we have no home. That we have no hope. That we remain captives to sin, death, and hell forever. And when Jesus bowed His bloody head in death, it looked like that's exactly what happened.

Except with Jesus, things are not as they appear. And that truth became evident when on the first Easter morning, the rubble of God's death-wracked Temple was raised to life again. When the seal of the grave was broken and life triumphed. When sin's price had been paid and so the angels announced to the women, **He is not here, He is risen, just as He said** (Matt 28:6). Yes, *just as He said*. For this is why He came. It was all according to plan. Jesus died our death. He bore our sins and died our death, that we may live His life. Now *and forever*.

And so Jesus told His disciples that day: ***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*** No one, because no one else could defeat death for us, no one else could atone for our sin, no one else could bind the satanic strong man and plunder his house (Matt 12:29). Only Jesus. He is the way through death to life.

And so because of Him we can say with the psalmist: ***I shall not die, but I shall live.*** And know that is the truth. Yes, ***we have this treasure in jars of clay,*** and we lay jars of clay to rest in the ground, to await the great and glorious day of our Lord's return and the resurrection of all flesh. Confident that just as our Lord's body of clay was raised to life again, so too we will be raised with Him. When the day comes for our exile to end. When the day comes for us to go home. Sunday morning was that day for Oma. *Today* may be the day for us! But it matters not. ***Our Lord knows the plans He has for you . . . plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*** Plans for life.

So go live that life. If Oma were here today she would probably say, *"Don't worry about me! I'll be fine."* Indeed she is. More than we know. She would tell us to go to church. She would tell us to pray. She would tell us to hear the Word of God and believe it. She would tell us to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord and live always in His forgiveness. *And then she would give you something!* I don't think I ever left Oma's empty-handed, or empty-hearted. And maybe in that way she was most like her heavenly Father and her Saviour. For He never leaves you empty-handed either. You come weak, doubting, fearful, sinful, troubled, and He fills you with His good things - His Word, His forgiveness, His faith, His Spirit, His life. And as Oma received, so she gave. May it be so for us as well.

So today, as your eyes fill with tears, let faith fill your hearts. As your eyes are filled with sorrow, let your ears be filled with the words of Jesus; the same words that filled Oma's ears, too: ***Let not your hearts be troubled. . . . Surely goodness and***

mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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