

23 April 2019  
Funeral of Phyllis Martin

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Ladybug”

Text: Luke 24:13-35; Job 19:23-27; Acts 13:26-33

*Alleluia! Christ is risen!* [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] Alleluia!

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

Philip, Harmon, Maureen, Mary, and family,

My mother had a picture of Jesus laughing in her living room. I don't know where that picture is now - I hope I still have it. But laughter is the first thing I think of when I think of Phyllis. Whenever I went to visit her, she was always smiling and we always made each other laugh. I would tease her to get her to laugh - especially about the chocolate she always seemed to have hidden around her apartment, even though she was diabetic. And she never let me leave empty handed. She always made sure I had some goodies to take home and share with the family.

But life wasn't all smiles for Phyllis. She had her share of disappointments, too. She hadn't planned on her dear Harmon getting Parkinsons, and having to take care of him all those years. She hadn't planned on back surgery and bad knees. She had so hoped to see her great-grandchildren baptized, but, she said, she didn't want to nag. And she didn't plan on this last year and a half and all the difficulties that came after her stroke. Telegraph Road and the house “out in the country,” the car trip around the country after Harmon's retirement, those were the good times. More recently, though, it was rough - for her, and for all of you.

Not unlike those two disciples we heard about in the Holy Gospel from St. Luke, walking back home to a village named Emmaus. They were disappointed. Things hadn't gone as they had hoped or planned. They remembered the good times - Jesus teaching the crowds, the healings and other miracles. They had hoped He was the one, the promised Messiah. But then there was the arrest, the rigged trial, the crucifixion, and the cruel, agonizing death of their friend. It was rough. And all they had now were the memories and the dashed hopes. Or so they thought.

But this stranger who came up to them and walked with them, he had a different perspective . . . He wasn't sad or disappointed, but *confident*. All that had happened, he said, it had been written, it had been prophesied, hundreds, thousands of years

before. It was how things had to be, and God worked good through it. And they began to have hope again. What they saw had been so bad. But, they had to admit, the words of the stranger, the Word of God, gave them hope.

And then, just for a moment, they saw - Jesus revealed Himself to them as the stranger that had been walking with them! He was alive, risen from the dead. He had fulfilled all the Word of God. And their sadness and disappointment was now gladness and joy!

And so it is for us here today. We are disappointed and sad, but the Word of God gives us hope. The Word of God which tells us that Jesus died in order to destroy death, so they we who die might have the hope of life again. The hope expressed by Job when he said:

*For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and at the last He will stand upon the earth.  
And after my skin has been thus destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I shall see God,  
whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold,  
and not another.*

After my skin has been destroyed, he says, my flesh, my eyes, I myself shall see God, as those disciples walking home to Emmaus did for a moment. But for Job it will be for more than a moment, because his flesh, his eyes, he himself will be raised from the dead, never to die again. *Because our Redeemer lives!*

We sang that loud and strong on Sunday. We'll sing it again at the conclusion of the service today. It is what gives us hope in this world of sin, disease, and death. Because we know that though we die, we too are going to rise and see God - our flesh, our eyes, we ourselves - and not just for a moment, but for eternity. *Because our Redeemer lives!*

And Phyllis, she loved to sing. Whether it was in the choir, or as we sat at her dining room table, or in one of her other more recent rooms at Greenspring, having a service. The psalm we spoke today, Psalm 100, said: *make a joyful noise unto the Lord* - that was Phyllis. And Easter hymns, like the ones we are singing today, she especially liked to sing.

In those services, she would often express to me her worry that she was doing the right things; she knew her sins were many and great. So how thankful she was to hear again and again that she was a baptized child of God with a heavenly Father who loved her more than she knew. How wonderful for her to hear the words of absolution, that all her sins, every one of them, are forgiven in Jesus. How grateful she was to receive Jesus' Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper, to eat and drink the forgiveness and life of her Redeemer.

And one day, to help her remember all this between my visits, I gave her an icon of Jesus as the Good Shepherd - it was still hanging in her rooms at Greenspring. And I put a little sticker on it with her name and an arrow. And I stuck it onto that icon so that the arrow pointed to the lamb on Jesus' shoulders, and I said: *Phyllis, that's you*. Yes, you're a sinner, but Jesus died for you, Jesus has rescued you, and Jesus is carrying you. So you're good - good now to live in His joy, and good to go whenever He will call you home, which He did last week. Sad for us, but oh, how good for her!

As a pastor, my visits with her were some of the ones I enjoyed the very most. So I'm going to miss Ladybug - as her nurses called her. As you know, it was a most appropriate name, given her love of ladybugs and the blankets with the pictures of them that adorned her bed. But appropriate also for another reason, I think. I looked up ladybugs yesterday and found out that there is a legend that ladybugs got their name because they were first called "our Lady's birds" in the Middle Ages - a reference to the virgin Mary and the belief that these bugs were sent as an answer to prayer one year that saved their crops from a plague of pests.

Well, last week, Phyllis' prayers were answered. *Thy kingdom come . . . Thy will be done . . . Deliver us from evil*. The Lord gave her a blessed end. Not blessed because it was easy or because it was the way she wanted - but blessed because the Blessed one was with her in it. The Lord who baptized her, fed her, forgave her, and blessed and watched over her every day of her life, was there for the end as well, and *took her from this valley of sorrow to Himself in Heaven*. Or, as we sung:

*The strife is o'er, the battle done;  
Now is the victor's triumph won;  
Now be the song of praise begun. Alleluia!* (LSB #464).

So now Harm-Phyl acres is no more. It was good while it lasted. It was a place of faith, a place of joy and smiles. And a place which knew trouble and struggle and hardship, too. But a new place is coming. A place where there is no hunger, no thirst, no sorrow, no sadness, no sin, no tears. Only joy and laughter. I will always remember the joy and laughter Phyllis brought me. But even more I rejoice today in the joy and laughter Jesus has given Phyllis - the life He created for her, redeemed her for, and now has called her to. A life that will never end.

That is the life He has for you, too. That He wants for all people. That what we sing today may not be just for today, but for every day - the faith and confidence we have that whenever, however, our end comes, *I Know that My Redeemer Lives!* (LSB #461) My Redeemer, my Jesus, alive, for me.

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