

Jesu Juva

“Atop the Mountain in Victory”

Text: Job 19:23-27a; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57; Matthew 17:1-8

Scott, Lee, Max, family and friends . . .

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

The last two weeks have been filled with the glory of victory, as gold, silver, and bronze medals were given to athletes who excelled at the Olympic games. Many of them dedicated the whole lives in this one pursuit: to stand atop the mountain over all their peers.

And yet after witnessing these last two weeks of glory, here we are today, struggling with defeat. A foe that could not be beaten, a ruthless enemy who doesn't care who you are, where you're from, or how much you've accomplished in this life. A foe that's even going to overcome those stronger, faster, olympic medal winners one day, sooner or later. Death. The foe that sometimes strikes quickly, but sometimes takes it's time and drags things out, like it did for Lorena. The past few years have been a mighty struggle for her, and for all you family and friends who watched her battle. In the end she could not win. And death is standing triumphant at the top of the mountain . . . again.

At least, that's how it feels. That's how it seems. That's how it looks. But the Word of God we heard today tells us of a very *different* reality.

We first heard it from Job. In so many ways, what Job went through - all the struggles, all the losses - reminds me of what Lorena went through. And yet in the midst of the struggle, in the midst of the pain and fear and specter of death, Job could utter those defiant words: ***I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth.*** Or in other words, someone other than death is going to be the last man standing. In the end, someone other than death is going to be victorious and at the top of the mountain. A Redeemer. A Saviour. ***And after my skin has been thus destroyed,*** Job continues, ***yet . . . in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.*** These eyes, Job says, are going to see God. After my eyes close in death, these same eyes are going to open again and see again. And see God. My Redeemer, my Saviour. Job knew He couldn't beat death. But He knew there was One who could. One who would be victorious. And One who was going to give that victory to him. *Lorena knew that, and knew Him, too.*

And then like Job, St. Paul also spoke defiantly against death: ***“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”*** Death stings now, but its victory is only

temporary. There is a day coming, Paul says, when *we shall all be changed*. And that change will be quite different than what we witnessed the past few years, as Lorena slowly lost the use of her arms and legs, her speech and then her wonderful smile and laugh, to the ravages of that horrible disease. But that will *all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet*. For on that day - not slowly, but in a moment! - what was lost will be given, what was weak will be strong, what was mortal will be made immortal, and what has perished will be raised imperishable - never to perish again! And then, on that day, we will be the ones mocking death. O death, you stung so sharply and looked so strong - but look at you now! Now *you're* the loser, once and for all. Because One stronger than you has come. One has come and fought for us. One, of whom Paul then says: *Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*

The victory foreshadowed for us with Jesus in His transfiguration. There He is atop the mountain. There He is in glory. There He is, the eternal God in human flesh. Job's Redeemer. Paul's defeater of death. Our Saviour. And Peter was right. He was right when he said: *Lord, it is good for us to be here*. It is good to be with Jesus in His glory.

But so that this moment in time might become an eternal reality, Jesus could not stay there. Not yet. He had to leave that mountain of glory just as He had left His heavenly glory to ascend another mountain - a mountain of shame and death. A mountain called Calvary. That was the mountain that would make all the difference in the world. For there, on that mountain Jesus would take our sin and make atonement for it. There, on that mountain, He would take our death and break it. There, on that mountain He took on death and satan in a fierce battle . . . and for three days and three nights, it seemed like death and satan won. And the disciples, like us today, were stung and sad and frightened. And that glory Peter, James, and John had seen not that long ago, seemed like a very distant memory indeed.

Yet on that third day, there was only one man left standing: Jesus. His resurrection from death the final nail in satan's coffin. His resurrection from death the beginning of a glory - for us! - that will never end. The beginning of a life - for us! - that will never end.

That life Jesus gave to Lorena when He baptized her so many years ago. She didn't earn it or deserve it - it was a gift. Just as it is for us. She was baptized *in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, and when she was, God put His Name on her and said **you are mine**. My little girl. And I promise, He said, to be there for you in life and in death. In life with my forgiveness and love, in death with my victory and life. And He was. Even these past few years of struggle. Lorena's Saviour was there with her, not letting the evil foe win not letting the evil foe snatch away His child. Jesus was there with Lorena, her strength in weakness, her hope in hopelessness, her life in death. Giving her His absolution, His forgiveness for her sins, feeding her with His Body and Blood, and all the while, preparing a place for her in His home (John 14:3), until Friday morning

He said to her: *It's time*. And in death, she passed through the gate to everlasting life. Her Good Shepherd leading her through that dark valley that He Himself went through first (Psalm 23:4-5), that she come out victorious with Him on the other side.

We didn't see any of that. We saw death. We saw separation. We felt pain. But don't let your eyes deceive you. As the voice of the Father told the disciples that day on the mountaintop: "***This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.***" Listen. Don't let your eyes deceive you - listen. Listen to His promises made to you too, and believe them. Listen to His forgiveness given to you too, and believe it. Listen to Him. And then you too will hear His voice on the last day, when to Lorena and *all* His children He says (as He did on the mountaintop that day): "***Rise, and have no fear.***" And we will rise from death and be on the mountaintop, with Him, in victory, in glory, forever.

The hymns we sing today confessed these truths beautifully. Lorena loved it when I sang to her when I visited her. The first hymn we sang today, Lorena's favorite, said: *Neither life nor death shall ever From the Lord his children sever*. Because we are *Children of the Heavenly Father* (LSB #725). And the Lord who *Abides with Us* (LSB #878) is the *help of the helpless*, and though *change and decay in all around I see*, the One who *changest not* is with us to bless. And *For all the Saints* (LSB #677) those made holy by the forgiveness of their sins, who *feebly struggle* when *the fight is fierce* and *the warfare long*, there *breaks a yet more glorious day; the calm of paradise the blest*. That calm and rest that Lorena now enjoys, and the songs that now fill her ears are no longer from the dried out voice of her pastor, but the glorious song of the angels.

So while Lorena has left us now after 89 years - 89 years filled with ups and downs, many joys and many struggles, now she is home, where she will never have to leave again. What joy and confidence that is for us now who mourn, and for us who do not know how many years any of us have left. But in Jesus, this we know: **that we are no longer living a life that will end in death; we will now die a death that ends in life.** When we too will be on the mountaintop, with Jesus, in His glory. With Moses and Elijah, Paul and Job, Peter, James, and John, and Lorena, and all who have gone before us in the faith. There in victory. The victory of our Saviour. Once and for all.

Scott, Lee, Max, family and friends, rejoice in that. And let your tears of sadness be also tears of joy.

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