

Jesu Juva

“Waiting No More”

Text: Isaiah 25:6-9; Romans 8:28-39; Luke 2:25-32

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

Almost twelve years ago, a lady showed up at the door of my hotel room with a big smile and an even bigger bowl of deliciousness she called *banana pudding*. I had just met Lorena.

For the next number of years I would get to know her better, from the time we spent together in evangelism meetings and Bible studies, to handing out stuff at the Metro station or at our booth at Viva Vienna, to canvassing the neighborhoods around the church, to time spent in the hospital after she fell and split her head open while distributing door hangers for the church, or when she was there for some other problem. And then the past few years, as I went to visit her in her home, when her legs could no longer carry her to church, and then when her arms could no longer hold a hymnal, and then when it was a struggle to even eat and drink the Body and Blood of her Lord. But that last one was a good struggle, to feed on her Lord. That she wanted. The struggle with the disease . . . well, who would want that?

Martin Luther once said that all the trials God sends us during our lives is to strengthen our faith for the last and greatest trial of all: death. I think that must be right, for while Lorena endured a mighty trial and struggle these last few years, the Lord had provided her with a great faith. A great faith that first became evident to me about a year after I got here. By all appearances, the church wasn't doing so great at that time. We were struggling. You had finally got a pastor and now after a year had passed, the church was smaller than when I arrived. And then when two more members told us they were leaving, moving away, it was like another kick in the gut. And it was Lorena, and her faith, that encouraged us all. I hope I was able to return the favor to her these last few years.

Lorena also struggled in other ways as well. She was blessed with a very large family, but one that had a lot of trials. I don't think anyone added as many names to our prayer list than Lorena. She always had a brother or sister, a niece or a nephew that needed our prayers. And she attended many of their funerals. But prayer was precious to Lorena, and she was good at it. Part and parcel of her strong faith. Once, I remember, after all the pastors and chaplains in our congregation had left and moved on to other places, I told her to pray for God to send us another pastor, so I would have someone to fill in for me when I went on vacation. And the very next week, guess who showed up!

But not all Lorena's prayers got answer *in that way*. They were all answered, to be sure. Our Lord promised that. But her prayers that she would one day be able to come back to church; maybe that she would be healed, or that at least her disease would lessen - to those our Lord said **no**. This was part of His plan - not for harm but for good. A mystery to us, to be sure. But we don't rely on and believe what we think or see, but on God's Word and on His promises. That Word that we heard again tonight, that God works ***all things together for our good***. And so we believe God was able to turn even this dreaded disease called ALS to work His good.

And so these past few years, it seems to me that Lorena was a lot like Simeon. Simeon, as we heard, was waiting. Waiting for the promise of God to him to be fulfilled. He was waiting to see the Lord's Christ. The promised Saviour. God promised Simeon that he would not die until he did. We're not told how long Simeon waited for that promise, and how many trials and struggles he had along the way, but it might have been quite a long time.

Lorena was waiting to see the Lord's Christ, her Saviour, as well. Not before she died - that was the promise made to Simeon - but *after* she died. That was the promise made to her. The promise made to her so many years ago, when she was baptized *in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. That day when through the hand of a pastor, the Lord's Christ, her Saviour, baptized her Himself and said to her: *You are mine. You are my child*. On that day Lorena was born from above and given faith and forgiveness and the Spirit of God, and the promise of Jesus that nothing will separate you from my love - ***neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation***.

And for 89 years, Jesus kept that promise to her, and *especially*, I would say, these past few years when the joys were fewer and the sorrows were multiplied. Still Jesus strengthened her through His Word, sustained her with His forgiveness, and fed her with His Body and Blood. Until Friday morning, when Jesus let His servant Lorena ***depart in peace, according to His Word***. For us a day of great sadness. For her a day of great joy.

But for us a day of great joy as well, knowing that another child of God has made it home, to *Jerusalem the Golden* (LSB #672). That another *saint from her labors rests* (LSB #677). That the *Strife is O'er, the Battle Done* (LSB #464). Yes, the battle done, for that battle was won not by Lorena, and not by us, but by the very Son of God Himself. The eternal Son of God who came down from heaven and was made man. Who came down from His throne of glory to do battle for us. To fight satan and win. To take our sin and atone for it. To die our death and conquer it. And to be laid in our tomb and break its cold, hard grip in His resurrection. And to give that victory to us. To us who feebly struggle.

That's what the prophet Isaiah said some 700 years before Jesus, the God-man, was born. He said that there would be a mountain upon which the Lord would swallow up forever the death that swallows us up; where the Lord would take away our reproach, our sin, our shame; where the Lord would provide a great feast for His people. And we now know that mountain was called Golgotha, or Calvary. And that Jesus did it! And that now, through His cross, through His death and resurrection, our sins are forgiven, there is life that not even death can end, and we have been provided with the feast of feasts. A feast even better than the finest of wines and the best of meats. The feast of our Lord's Body and Blood. The food that feeds us not just for a time, but for eternity.

And Isaiah finished up that promise with these words: ***It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*** There's that waiting again. Waiting for the day. Simeon's waiting, Lorena's waiting, our waiting.

And as surely as that day finally came for Simeon and Lorena, so surely it will come for you and for all who are in Christ Jesus. For as St. Paul said: ***What then shall we say to these things? To the tribulation and distresses of this world. If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*** Indeed He will. For in Christ Jesus, ***we are more than conquerors*** - we are sons of God. Sons of God in the Son of God. Possessors of an everlasting inheritance in heaven. For Jesus came and took all that is ours, our sin and death, and gave us all that is His, His life and His kingdom. A great exchange, so that you too can ***depart in peace***. *Whenever* that time comes for you, be it sooner or later, suddenly or slowly. For your Saviour has done it all, *for you*.

So we sing in great joy this night, wonderful hymns containing the stong words and promises of God. And we'll eat a little banana pudding in honor of Lorena. But best of all, we'll feast tonight on our Lord - a foretaste of the feast to come. The feast where it's not just us, but we join with *the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven*. One church, visible and invisible, in communion around one Lord, until our waiting is over. When the one Simeon once took up in his arms takes us up in His arms, and ***wipes away tears from all faces***. Tears, then, no longer of sorrow, but of a joy that will have no end.

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