

18 September 2020
Committal of Connie Smith

National Memorial Park
Falls Church, VA

Jesu Juva

“Praise the Lord!”

Text: Psalm 150; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57; Matthew 28:1-10

The 150th Psalm might seem like an odd psalm to choose at such a time as this, in such a place as this. Cemeteries are more places of sadness and tears than they are of praise. It is hard to praise when we are feeling the hurt of separation and the sting of death. A hurt and separation that Connie well knew, when her husband died, when her friend Phyllis died, and surely at other losses as well, family and friends alike.

But I chose this psalm because this is the phrase the Connie would always say to me whenever I saw her. ***Praise the Lord***. Maybe to you, too. No matter how she was feeling that day, no matter where we were or what was happening, I knew she would say this to me. And if she were here with us today, I think she still would. ***Praise the Lord***, even in a cemetery.

Which we can! Because we know that death is not the end for those who are in Jesus, baptized into Him. Yes, we will die, but our life will not end. Because as those women who went to the tomb on Easter morning found out, those women who were hurting and sad, who were feeling the sting of death and had eyes filled with tears, **death had been defeated**. The tomb was empty. Jesus had risen, just as He said He would. Which means the final word in the battle between life and death . . . goes to life. Graves look so deep and so final, but today we look beyond the grave, beyond what we can see, to what we hear.

And what we heard today is this: ***“Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

With these words, St. Paul is looking into the grave, *and mocking it*. The death that defeated us has itself been defeated. The sin that stings us has been stung. The Law which condemns us can condemn us no more. Because Jesus took it all on, and won. The victory is His and so it is ours, too. Just as His grave was empty that first Easter morning, so too will this grave be empty on the final day - Connie’s Easter morning. Connie risen just as her Lord. Her perishable body then imperishable. Her mortal body then immortal. The question is not if, but when. ***Must*** is the word Paul used. This *must* happen, because Jesus has brought sin, death, grave, and hell to its knees.

And that is a reason we *praise the Lord!* It is easy to praise the Lord when things are going well, life is easy, and everything is going our way. But to be able to praise the Lord here, in this place, at such a time as this, is a gift.

A gift from our risen Lord and Saviour. Whose grave, actually, *wasn't* empty that first Easter morning. The reading we heard from Matthew never said that - only that Jesus was not there. But when He rose, alive and victorious, the carcasses of your sins remained in the grave. Jesus rose, but they never will.

Which is another reason to *praise the Lord!* Because sometimes, when a loved one dies, we have regrets. I could have done this or that. I should have visited more. I wish I had said this or hadn't said that. And those can weigh heavy on us. But Jesus' resurrection means you are free from that guilt. He took it away from you and bore it Himself on the cross. He paid for it. So you are free. And whatever sin and guilt Connie had is gone, too. For her, for us, in Jesus, there is only life. A life that not even death can end.

And so we have a joy that death cannot end either. Even at a time like this, even in a place like this. Yes, we are sad, but at the same time can *praise the Lord*. Which, I think, is what Connie would say to us if she were here with us today. So I'll say it for her. And I hope you will, too. Everyday. To remind yourself, and to tell others, of the victory that is ours in Jesus.

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