

6 August 2024
Committal of Nancy Jean Nelson

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A New Day”

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; John 11:17-27

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Martha’s lament might very well be our lament today. *Lord, if you had been here, my wife, my sister, my grandmother, my friend, would not have died.* And we make such a lament not against Jesus, but in love for Nancy. We want her back.

But as much as we love Nancy, her heavenly Father loves her even more. And it was time for her to go home and be with Him. With the Father who created her, the Son who redeemed her on the cross, and the Spirit who sanctified her.

And because of that, we *do not grieve*, as St. Paul said, *as others do who have no hope*. For Nancy’s is not a life now ended, but now begun anew. Begun anew beyond the realities of sin and suffering, which made her life the past few years such a struggle at times. Begun now in the rest of eternity and the arms of her Saviour. So yes, we grieve, but we grieve with hope, and we cry with joy.

It has become fashionable these days not to have funerals, but *celebrations of life*. There is a place for that, I suppose. But not as a replacement for a funeral. Not for a Christian. For a *celebration of life* looks backwards, to the past, to a life (hopefully) well-lived. But as Christians we are always looking forward, to the future, to a glorious life that awaits. A future promised us by Jesus.

Jesus promised that future to Nancy when He baptized her and made her *His little lamb* (LSB #740); that she would rise just as surely as He did. He then repeated that promise to her with the forgiveness of her sins. And as He fed and strengthened her with the Supper of His Body and Blood, He pledged that life to her, that this food she was eating was no mere food, but bread of life; food that gives eternal life. And that filled Nancy with joy. Joy in, as we sang, her *Beautiful Savior* (LSB #537).

And Jesus gave us a preview of that in the story we heard today, of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Lazarus has been in the tomb *four days*. The family was still grieving, and no doubt talking about lots of good memories, like all of you. But instead of looking back, Jesus directs them to the future. To the resurrection. A resurrection that will not happen by chance or by nature, but because of *Him*. Because Jesus has come to defeat death and the grave with His own resurrection from it. So He tells Martha, *I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who*

lives and believes in me shall never die.

Never die. That sounds nice, doesn't it? If we didn't have to be here. If we never had to be here. If there were no cemeteries. But there are. But God helps us here, redefining death for us. He calls it *sleep*. Just sleep. Like when you're exhausted after a full day and you lay down and *aaahh!* Nancy was exhausted. From the hospitalizations, the tests, the treatments. And two weeks ago she laid down and went to sleep. Not on a bed, but in the arms of Jesus.

And one day Jesus is going to return, and raise her body that we are here laying to rest today. Raise this body to life. Because He *is the resurrection and the life*. And that's a promise for us, too. For all people. In Jesus. Which Martha confessed with her words, that she believed this. And that we confess with our words, too, that *I believe* this.

So we mourn today and we cry today and we look forward to the day we will see Nancy again. I told Ken what my father told me when my mother died: *It's hard being the one left behind*. And it is. No doubt. But we take comfort in the fact that just like Lazarus, Jesus leaves no one behind. He is coming for us. And as He once told that thief hanging on the cross next to Him, and as He said to Nancy two weeks ago, and as He will one day say to us all by grace through faith: *Today, you will be with me, in Paradise* (Luke 23:43).

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