

Thursday, 29 March 2007

THE FUNERAL OF THE REV. DAVID A. LAST

Psalm 118:19-24; 29

"Oh Give Thanks to the LORD!"

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"Open to me the gates of righteousness that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it...Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"

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DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST JESUS, MEMBERS OF ST. MARTIN'S, COLLEAGUES IN THE PASTORAL MINISTRY, AND ESPECIALLY YOU, LUANN, KARRIE AND JAY, OLIVE, ROBERT, AND DAVID'S FAMILY:

David—what a study in contrasts! When he was just a boy God set David apart for special service. He had to grow into the role God planned for him, and, frankly, he didn't always do too well. Impetuous, proud—even arrogant sometimes—he acted in ways that could raise eyebrows and set tongues wagging. That was David. He didn't always say and do the right things. People looked to him for leadership. Sometimes he did well with that, and sometimes he didn't. He made some enemies along the way, even among the people of God. Some were out to get him. Even within his family there were struggles that gave him fits, just as he gave others fits. But through it all God never abandoned him, and even though David was a sinner, he never forgot God.

Especially in his darkest hours he clung to God's precious promises and found the greatest strength and comfort and resolve in an unwavering faith in the God of his salvation. That was David.

But I'm not speaking about David Last. I'm speaking about David the shepherd boy who became the greatest King in the history of Israel—David the sinner and David the saint—David the Psalmist. Even though he did not write this Psalm, still it's in keeping with his faith! I'm not comparing David Last with David, son of Jesse. But David Last knew the teachings of David, son of Jesse, and found solace in the Psalms. The reason the Psalms speak to us so vividly and so well, especially David's Psalms, is that they reflect the heart of a sinful human being. They reflect a man who knew honor and power and prestige, as well as a man who sank to the depths of sin and sorrow!

Martin Luther considered Psalm 118 his favorite. He once said, "This is my psalm, my chosen psalm. I love them all; I love all Holy Scripture, which is my consolation and my life. But this psalm is nearest my heart, and I...call it mine. It has saved me from many a pressing danger, from which nor emperor, nor kings, nor sages, nor saints could have saved me. It is my friend; dearer to me than all the honors and power of earth." Martin knew what it was to be tested in the faith. He was a sinner who learned to rely on the grace of God.

Today we give Christian burial to David Last, sinner and saint, who learned the same things Martin Luther learned. Today we rejoice with the saints in heaven and on earth for the fulfillment of God's promises through Jesus, his beloved Son and our Savior! Today we thank and praise God for the grace that sustained David Last and the grace that sustains all of us.

"Open to me the gates of righteousness," the Psalmist says, "that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." For all of his faults and for all of his sins, David knew that God loved him. He knew that Jesus was and is the gate of righteousness, the stone rejected by the builders but made the cornerstone by God. David knew that his only righteousness was that which came by faith in Jesus alone! LuANN, I noticed in David's study the "white board" leaning against the chair, and on it were the words VICARIOUS ATONEMENT. How fitting that those should be some of the last words David wrote, because the vicarious atonement is what the faith is all about.

David cherished the absolution spoken in Jesus' name, and I pray that you do as well. You and I are no different from David! In God's sight all sin is the same, and all sinners need the same forgiveness. That's why he sent his Son into the world. Jesus didn't pour out his life's blood for bad choices or character flaws. He died because of SIN. That's what the Bible calls everything that's not in keeping with God's will for us! It took the blood of the innocent, perfectly holy Son of God to pay the price of God's judgment. The same blood we receive, along with his body, in the Sacrament Jesus has bequeathed to his Church. The Sacrament that meant so much to David not only to celebrate but especially to receive for his forgiveness and comfort and strength.

LuANN, you're walking your own Via Dolorosa in your grief, and we're here to walk with you. But remember that Jesus walked that path before you, and you can walk it with confidence, we all can walk it with confidence. We walk with confidence because we're headed toward the open tomb! Death doesn't win—life

wins—eternal life in Christ Jesus! And because of all that God has done for us, with the Psalmist we say, "This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Yes, even today we rejoice and are glad!

I knew David for almost 30 years, the good and the bad. While we had our differences, I know that in his heart David's fervent desire was to be a faithful servant of God—to preach and to teach the pure Word of God and celebrate the Sacraments in the presence of God's people. Not everyone agreed with or appreciated David's liturgical bent, but it was in the pulpit and at the altar that he felt most at home. That's because in those places he stood before God's people as a witness to the Christ.

Even in sorrow—especially in sorrow, as Christians—we say, "Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever." By the grace of God David died in the faith, and it's in that faith that we commend him to God, confident that we will be reunited with all of the saints in light in God's eternal kingdom! I pray for you especially, LuANN, that God gives you a special measure of his peace—the peace that passes all understanding and will enable you to go on in life in the same saving faith that sustained David! "Open to me the gates of righteousness that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it." By God's grace David has entered that gate eternally, and we will too. "Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he IS GOOD and his steadfast love endures FOREVER."

AMEN