

Ruby Cavanaugh Memorial Sermon
Saturday, January 9th, 2016
St. John's Lutheran Church of Orange

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And may the Lord pour out an extra measure of His Spirit upon you Doug and upon you Jane, and all of Ruby's family and loved ones who – while rejoicing in Ruby's eternal joy in Christ – also miss her and will always miss her as we continue our earthly sojourn. In Jesus Name. Amen.

Ruby shared with me a few times one of the most indelible memories of her childhood. She was active in the Church as a musician and she served and glorified the Lord Jesus Christ by taking part in a vocal trio. She and two other young ladies served by singing in Church for regular and special services. The #1 piece that they sang and the one that became part of Ruby's soul was the hymn "Beautiful Savior". Ruby loved this hymn. It affirmed her life-long walk with the love of her life: The Lord Jesus Christ. Ruby loved her Beautiful Savior and for 93 years her Beautiful Savior loved her...He still does!

"Beautiful" of course is a powerful word, we can all relate to it. It represents what captivates us, allures and draws us; attracts and inspires us; we don't want to take our eyes off of what is beautiful. We love what is beautiful. It makes us want to live. It fills us with joy and wonderment. We cherish the beautiful and if we could, we would gaze upon it and never stop. We want to be around what is beautiful. We never want to let go of what is beautiful. We always want it. Time stops when we are in the presence of the beautiful and it is probably one of the best qualities of eternity as it represents that which we never tire of and never get bored with.

Ruby considered Jesus as beautiful. But why? The rest of the hymn's title tells us why: Jesus is *Savior*. His name "Jesus" -- not His title "Christ" which means "King" or "Anointed One" -- means "Savior"! Jesus, *Yeshua*, Joshua, all mean the same thing: "Savior". A Savior rescues. If you're in a burning building about to perish, but a firefighter comes to your rescue and saves your life, then that firefighter is a savior, he's a rescuer. And you would owe him your life.

But what of the ultimate "fire"? You see the Christian faith is about addressing what all people – all 7 billion of us on planet earth – are really concerned about: this thing called "death". The bottom line is that Jesus is the Beautiful Savior because He came to deal with our death, our greatest personal threat, and our greatest enemy. He came to save us and rescue us from death. In John 11:25-26: ***"Jesus said to her, '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.'"*** How does one account for Ruby being so full of life? Obviously all people

around us are alive, but there are some people who bring light into a room; life overflows in such people. This was Ruby. How? She knew Jesus the Savior from death. This enemy called death has been defeated. Ruby knew it and trusted in the Lord of Life, the conquerer of death so that death was no longer an issue. This is why she could speak so confidently about wanting to go home. She knew that for the one who belongs to Jesus, death is no longer a threat. It's been beat; it's been conquered. That's what Jesus has done for us when on the third day after His crucifixion to cover the sins of the world with His blood, He rose from death!

Jesus has all kinds of names and titles in Scripture: Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Good Shepherd, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Son of God and Son of Man (both of which are titles of divinity, power, and authority), but none of these are the most basic and beautiful of names, the simple name, the glorious name, the actual name of Jesus/Savior!

Ruby knew she had a Savior. She was baptized into this Savior, she received the Word of this Savior into her heart and mind; she received the body and blood of this Savior in Holy Communion; she was full of the life of her Beautiful Savior. What does this do to a person? It leads to the rest of the story for those who trust in and follow the Savior: when you know that your death is totally taken care of so that you will remain in the presence of the Lord of life even after you take your last breath, you know a relief and liberation! You become released from fear and dread of that which overtakes life on account of the Lord who has overtaken death!

Without the Beautiful Savior death retains its condemning power. Without Jesus, death is separation from God, what Jesus described as "outer darkness," and "the place where the worm does not die," and the "place of weeping and gnashing of teeth". But when through faith you hold to Jesus the Savior, then that cloud is removed, the cancer is successfully radiated, and fear is chased away...and when that happens there is only one thing that remains: love and the celebration of life, life secure, life promised, life that continues not in darkness, not in separation from God, not in weeping and gnashing of teeth (what we fear most about death), but a life that knows rescue and liberation from all of these threats...life becomes a joy; life becomes a love affair with the Beautiful Savior. This Ruby knew. But how is such a life lived? When you're full of this confidence and joy, then that life translates into loving and caring for other people! This is the result of such a life, because living for yourself is the saddest and most miserable way to live...our lives are meant to be extensions of God's love, extensions of the gift of life, enhancing life for others...this Ruby knew.

She cared for and loved her children beyond measure. She knew how hard you work Doug and prayed for your health and strength, always wanting the absolute best for you; always a mom lookin' out for her son. She also shared with me how much she loved you Jane and sincerely wanted me to serve you as I served her and your brother...she wanted you to always be strong in the Word of God. She cared about her grandchildren and would quite

simply do anything for them; she cared for her daughter-in-law Julie who was in truth like another daughter to her; she cared for her church family and could never sever her ties to her home church at Peace Lutheran Church in Tustin; she cared for her family and friends and considered it as a holy ministry to stay in touch, to frequently connect, to show love, concern, and compassion, but if she was here standing by me right now she'd probably say, "enough about me pastor...get to the Beautiful Savior, get to the Source, get to the One who saved me from sin and death; get to the reason for my life and love; get to the truly Beautiful One, because I care about all of my family and friends that are gathered here today. I care about them and I want them to know what I knew and know...get to *The Beautiful Savior* pastor!"

And of course I must, because funerals and memorials are not so much for those who are with Christ in glory, but for the rest of us still here. So why the Beautiful Savior? It's an important question because in our relativistic age we are tempted to follow the insane and illogical idea that A equals B so that if *you* say that the moon is made of cheese and *I* assert that the moon is rather made of lollipops while both of us hold to relativism, then we are both right, not because any of our assertions align with reality and a real state of affairs, but because this is what we "choose" to believe and once that happens then all bets for objectively and truth are off the table. But such relativism doesn't care, because the pursuit is not about truth, but about myths and fables...about what people want.

Christianity will have none of this baloney and I stand before you, because I represent truth. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (Jn 14:6) Ruby knew this. Jesus corresponds to truth and the real solution that God has given for death. How do we know this? Christianity came onto the world scene inundated in the Greek culture and immersed in the most important lawful religion of the day, namely Judaism. From a reasonable and logical perspective, the major tenets of the Christian faith should have dissipated within a generation because its most important teaching -- the resurrection of Jesus Christ -- was diametrically opposed to both the Greek worldview *and* Judaism. Neither of these would support the idea of Jesus' resurrection if indeed it was *merely* an idea. Christian resurrection was repugnant to the Greek view that cast the spiritual realm as superior to the material realm. The idea of any deity returning back to the physical realm was nonsensical and was considered the height of foolishness. At the same time, Judaism also believed in the resurrection, but with a major qualifier: when Messiah rose, that event would occur on a universal scale. A single resurrection flew in the face of accepted Judaism. And yet Christianity did not merely survive a culture designed to reject it and bury it, but it in fact EXPLODED and grew exponentially. How does one explain this? The burden of proof does not rest on Christianity, but on anyone who rejects it. Christianity exploded because it is true and corresponds to reality.

But there's more. This faith which grew exponentially is testified to in accord with the most reliable and respected standard of historical verification: eye-witness testimony. There is an inescapable historical fact about the tomb of Jesus Christ. Three days after he was dead and

buried in His tomb, His tomb became empty, His body was gone. This fact is verified not only by Christian historians, but by Roman, Gnostic, and Jewish historians as well. Friend and foe alike, those with skin in the game and those without, all knew what actually happened: The Beautiful Savior died, was buried, and then His tomb was vacant. Historical fact. Universally recognized.

But there's more: If Jesus' enemies took His body, then they had the golden opportunity to destroy the Christian faith once and for all by simply producing it, but they couldn't, because they didn't have it. On the other hand, if Jesus' followers had His body, then what ensued next is beyond all reasonable understanding. Not only would they have contradicted the Lord's moral teaching which they had bound themselves to, but they had absolutely *nothing* to gain but persecution and martyrdom. But these followers instead witnessed to seeing Him alive after He died. And this eye-witness account was not held onto by one or two unstable souls, but by over 500 witnesses. (1st Corinthians 15) To the extent that when these witnesses were held to the extreme test of "renounce Christ or die," they gladly gave up their lives. Why? Because it was true...and for this to be true, then the Beautiful Savior kicked the you-know-what out of death. And if that was true – and it is – then disciples of Jesus like Ruby Cavanaugh have nothing to fear when it comes to death. Their Savior has opened heaven to them. These are the credentials of the Christian faith. Relativism says everything is true, which is a fancy way of saying nothing is true; Christianity says Christ is true, which is a simple way of saying that you my friends are being called to live and not to die. It is the Christian proclamation that to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ is have all of your sins – not some or most of your sins – but ALL of your sins forgiven by God and the absolute guarantee that God is pleased to permit you who trust in and honor His Beautiful Son, eternal life.

For the Christian death is no longer a punishment, but a reward, because death itself (for the one in Christ) is nothing more than a portal, a passageway, because the Christian knows Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life. His blood covers your sin. The truth has been established: His blood covers your sin period and God sees it no more! God now calls you through this Good News "Gospel" to believe it! God does *not* say that IF you *first* believe, then it's true; no it's already true: Jesus has died and risen for you...that's true already, no matter who you are...so now...believe it! His resurrection has conquered your death, so you have nothing to fear. On your own you can't stand up to death. On your own, it is too strong, but with Jesus, you're not on your own. With Jesus death is nothing. Ruby knew that. So can you.

Going all the way back to the 2nd century, the apostle John had a disciple named Polycarp. He was about to be martyred for the faith. "Thus the dialogue went on. When the judge threatened him with burning him alive, Polycarp simply answered that the fire that the judge could light would last only a moment, whereas the eternal fire would never go out. Finally, we are told that after he was tied to the post in the pyre, he looked up and prayed out loud: 'Lord Sovereign God...I thank you that you have deemed me worthy of this moment, so that, jointly with your martyrs, I may have a share in the cup of Christ...For this...I bless and

glorify you. Amen.” (Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1, 44) Such speak is not reserved for martyrs dear friends, but is appropriate for all who know the Beautiful Savior. He is yours too. He loves you. Loves you completely. Let us love Him back and as a result, see Ruby again in glory where we will expand that trio and sing the hymn “Beautiful Savior” in a way it has never been sung before!