

ANGELS CAME AND MINISTERED TO HIM

Our sermon for the first Sunday of Lent, this day we remember God's grace in calling Donald L. Polwort His son in holy baptism, is taken from our readings, with God's comfort for us found in the following translated verse:

*Then the devil continued to leave Him,
and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.*¹

Shirley, Donnie, Billie, family and friends of Don Polwort:

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

A short time ago, God called Don peacefully out of the heartaches and joys of this life into the perfection and glory of heaven. He who was, as you and I are, at times pursued by temptation and the devil, has been freed as the angels came and ministered to him. To human eyes, as it has been described, Don simply fell asleep, and, as those of the Faith understand it, awoke in the presence of ministering spirits who bore him to heaven. His falling asleep in the Lord is one of those rare passings, according to human perception, from this life fully into eternal life. He received that for which we Christians pray: *Remind us that we too are mortal, and prepare us to fall asleep in Faith and on the Last Day receive the glory promised to all who trust in Your Beloved Son...*²

In Christ, we know that Don, who so loved the old hymns and timeless liturgy of God's Church on earth has joined his now strong and perfect voice to the heavenly chorus surrounding the Lamb who was slain - Jesus who faced and conquered all temptation for him. Words, lyrics like, *When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise... and, God's Word forever shall abide...*, which once Don held to by faith without seeing the mysteries, he now sees and believes.³

In Christ, Don was prepared long ago for his complete entrance into the glorious presence of the eternal Lord. God worked this in him over 92 years ago when he was baptized into the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. There he began to learn

¹ Matthew 4:11.

² LCMS Commission on Worship. *Lutheran Service Book, Pastoral Care Companion*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007.

³ LCMS Commission on Worship. *Lutheran Service Book*, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2007, 744 and 657.

that it is, *not from bread alone shall man live, but upon every saying going out through the Mouth of God.*⁴ Through the decades of his mortal life God's preparation of Don through Word and Sacraments, gave him a wellspring of peace to tap into, even as he lived into his tenth decade of life's joys and challenges. Through the Faith, he believed in God's promises of heaven and the resurrection of the faithful to blessed eternal life. For Don, the challenges of this life are over, and full eternal joy of complete life in the Lord has begun. In the Faith, he now rests in our Lord. Because of that which Jesus did so long ago, these words are true since February 4 for St. Don Polwort:

*Then the devil continued to leave Him,
and behold, angels came and ministered to Him*"⁵

Of course, that text speaks first of Jesus. It was Jesus, by using the Word of God correctly as you heard today, who defeated the devil in his temptations to turn from God for bodily needs, personal gain, and divine-like power and glory on earth. Since Don was united with Christ through the Water and Word, as he clung to Christ, the devil had to leave him also. Don was free to live his life on earth in the comfort of knowing that his greatest enemy had been conquered.

In the faith he was given by God, Don believed truths that God revealed through His Word. Don grasped truths such as the temptation of our Lord, and in that Word saw Jesus' victory on his behalf. How was Don able to believe firmly the words of Holy Scripture?

He had been given the power of God. The Holy Spirit working faith through the Word gave him power to believe. The truth is: Don now beholds the Man who conquered temptation and the Tempter for us (Jesus the Christ). And on the Last Day, with His own eyes raised with His new body from the ashes of death, Don Polwort will see His Savior. That is all due to the Faith which God gave to him.

That same faith, throughout the years, as I knew him, especially in retirement, led Don to give thanks back to God for his salvation. He did this through his service to God's Church in congregations like this one. (Did you know that Don's signature is on my Diploma of Vocation – my Call Document)? He responded to

⁴ Matthew 4:4

⁵ Matthew 4:11.

God's love in his prayers, in his love and care for his family, his concern for his friends, and in many other ways. Although at various times in life he might have been tempted to think otherwise, and although he fell from time to time, (he was a sinner/saint in this life as are all who call upon the Name of the Lord in faith) Don did not appear to think all the good he did in this life was earning him a place in heaven. He knew that nothing he could do would get him a seat at his Lord's Table or a room in his heavenly Father's mansion.

Rather, Don confessed that heaven was his because God had given him a blood-bought gift. He learned to hold onto and use that gift throughout his lifetime, especially in his later years. Whenever life in this world, the devil, or his own sinful flesh tempted him to draw away from the Presence of the Lord, God called him back. Although Don used God's gift often each day, it is such that it never failed him. Do you know what that precious gift of God was? It was the saving faith of Jesus Christ. Just as God through His Word gave this gift to him, it is now being given to you. The Faith is a gift to be shared, especially at times when we experience earthly losses, such as that of this our friend, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

Right now, Don is sharing God's love in perfect harmony with all the company of heaven. His struggles from the realities of aging (such as discovering he had at times a 20 year old mind in a 90 year old body) are now over. Don knew what you heard today. The Lord promised to make him perfect in the Day of Salvation, the Day of Jesus. And his completed perfection has begun. Hear the promise again,

*In (the) season acceptable I heard you,
and in (the) Day of Salvation I helped you.
Behold now (is) (the) good acceptable season,
behold now (is the) Day of Salvation.⁶*

God has comfort for you in His Word that you have heard in this your time of loss. The Holy Spirit, speaking to us from the words of St. Paul, proclaims eternal truths into our ears. The right time for salvation is not simply in the past, nor far into the future. It is now. Hear again the Lord's Word of comfort, that which is given to all the faithful in this acceptable season of the Salvation of our Lord:

Then the devil continued to leave Him,

⁶ II Corinthians 6:2.

*and behold, angels came and ministered to Him"*⁷

Because the devil must flee from those who are held fast in the Faith of Christ, we grasp divine permission to not sorrow over the passing of our Christian brother as those who have no hope. For, in Christ, we have been set free, and God's ministering spirits attend to us even now. Sometimes they come in human form, as true men and women. Other times they come as invisible angels watching over the chosen ones of God.

Their presence with us is because we who were once captive to the devil are free. His ultimate power over us was taken away. He was bound as Christ broke death's strong bands, as He descended into the depths of the grave and proclaimed His victory.

God desires that we know in our inmost being that those who die in Christ do not die forever. For this reason, He inspired prophets of old to call the death of Christians, "sleep." The Lord wanted all believers to be comforted with the assurance that Christians sleep in the Lord. That is just what happened to our brother in the Faith. Death for the believer in Jesus Christ is not final. Those whose bodies sleep in Christ will have them awakened - we will be raised from death's sleep! At Jesus' coming, God will raise to blessed everlasting life the remains of Donald L. Polwort.

For him, this was not the first death. Don had already, through the Water and the Word, died with Christ on November 16, 1919. That same day he was raised to new life in Holy Baptism. Eternal blessed life began for Don ninety--two years ago. It came through the Word. Jesus affirmed this today, saying,

*"It remains written, 'Not from bread alone lives man, but by all the words proceeding through (the) Mouth of God.'"*⁸

All who live from the Word of God which proceeds from His Mouth, the verbal Word preserved without error in the Holy Scriptures, truly live in Christ. And, all who rest in Jesus will be raised to blessed eternal life on the Last Day. This is because we too have already died with Christ, and crossed over from death to life in him. Jesus did not escape death's sting. He took the full brunt of all that death brings on account of sin. Jesus did not "sleep." He died a most horrible death, and fully faced the Father's wrath at sin. Why

⁷ Matthew 4:11.

⁸ Matthew 4:4.

did He do that?

He did this to save Don; to save you. Because the Father loves you, Jesus had to die for you. Jesus took on all human temptation and death's misery in order that believers in His Name would not suffer the eternal torment of separation from the heavenly Father. Jesus died to give you the chance to sleep, to rest, and then someday to arise to stand tall and perfect in the New Heavens and Earth. The Word assures us of that reality to come, as God says,

*Surely goodness and loving-kindness will follow me
all (the) days of my life;
and I will dwell in (the) house of YHWH forever.⁹*

God's desire is that you not mourn as those who have no hope. All that we have or ever will have is ours because Jesus died for us. Because He rose from the dead, all who fall into death's sleep in Him will be brought out of the grave. Where will you be?

Those who are regular guests at the Lord's Table, where His cup of grace is offered, who receive His Body and Blood in the Faith for forgiveness can be certain that they have a place in the Lord's house forever. There, at the font, there in the Absolution, here, at the Lord's Table, God's people receive the benefits of the good acceptable season of our Lord's favor, and the gifts of His Day of Salvation. That which the Lord promised is yours:

*In (the) season acceptable I heard you,
and in (the) Day of Salvation I helped you.
Behold now (is) (the) good acceptable season,
behold now (is the) Day of Salvation.¹⁰*

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Funeral Sermon in memory of the Faith God gave to Don Polwort

Lent I (LSB One-year series)

Genesis 3:1-21; II Corinthians 6:1-11; Matthew 4:1-11

February 26, 2012

Paster Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA *oli* **Deo Gloria**

⁹ Psalm 23:6.

¹⁰ II Corinthians 6:2.