

THE NICEST MAN

Our sermon for the Third Saturday of Easter, this day we remember God's grace in naming and sustaining Wallace Roy Pflug His child into the Father's House, is taken from our inspired readings, as the Holy Spirit increases our hope as Jesus says:

Let not the heart of all of you be troubled. All of you continue to believe in the God, also into Me you all must continue to believe.¹

Alex and Laura, Sandy and Dan, Morgan and Hayden, family and friends of Wally Pflug: hear and receive the blessing of the God Who has conquered the grave:

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ
"The nicest man I have ever met." While that statement has been stated repeatedly about Saint Wallace Roy Pflug, he is the first to tell you that, if you think that of him, it is because of the nicest Man he ever met. Without a doubt, Wally certainly met that nicest Man when God washed Wally with the water and Word of Holy Baptism. The nicest Man in Wally's world watched over him, led him, restored him, caused him to walk in the right paths, fed him, and anointed him. From sometime in 1936 (from the moment of his conception) until March 7, 2013 (the moment he departed to be with Jesus) the nicest Man guided and guarded him safely through all his days and nights. Wally would have it sung that nicest Man still gives:

Goodness and mercy... and in God's house forevermore [Wally's] dwelling place shall be.²

Here, on that stand, is not Wally's eternal dwelling place. As you sang before this Funeral Service began, death cannot hold him.³ To those who know him, from the moment God opened Wally's lips, he seemed to have a song on them. In particular, his was, and is, the song of the Faith. The Faith which I proclaim, which was held by Wally, is that of Jesus, the Nicest Man.

You see, for decades, our now fully sainted brother-in-Christ was held fast by the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God into the good confession which we are singing, chanting, and hearing today. Through the words of this day's texts, chosen by Wally a few years ago, he is declaring the Nicest Man to you. He is the only God Who took on human flesh, Who became sin for us, and Who carried those sins into death and the grave. The Nicest Man then rose from the grave to present as right with the eternal Father all of us who continue to believe in and confess Him unto the end of our mortal days. This is

¹ John 14:1.

² *The Psalms of David in Meeter*, Edinburg, 1650, as found in *Lutheran Service Book*, "The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want," St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 710.

³ cf. Dudley-Smith, Timothy. *Lutheran Service Book*, "Christ Be My Leader," St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 861.

the confession that the Nicest Man works in those who believe in Him as true God and Man, the One Who rose bodily from the grave:

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel: for (it) remains (the) power of God into salvation for all the ones who continue believing, for (the) Jew certainly first, and for (the) Greek.⁴

In the Good News of the Nicest Man, the place in God's House for Saint Wally is now and eternally secure. He will have you know, that though you behold a box covered with white which contains his mortal remains, while his ashes reside next to those of his beloved Florence, that there they will not be held forever. In a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the trumpet sounds on the Last Day, all who have believed in God and in Christ Jesus His only-begotten Son will be raised from death's dust, and join the Nicest Man in the clouds. Wally, who now lives in Christ in spirit, will live again and forever in a glorified, perfect, and sinless body.

The readings today, and even the music, parallel those which rang out here on December 19, 2010. That is because the Pflug family decided to let the words which gave Wally so much comfort as St. Florence preceded him into the eternal Father's House be his way of communicating that which he believed and confessed in his time of grieving. For those of us who knew them well, it is very difficult to image one without the other...

And, because wherever Christ Jesus is, there is the company of the saints, whenever Wally was in the House of the Lord, at Jesus' Table on earth, he was with Flo. That is one reason why the emotion welled up within him when he received the Lord's Supper here, in his home, in assisted living, in the nursing home and in the hospital. That is one reason why, after Florence went before him into our heavenly Father's mansion, that as his whole family was gathered around God's Word in this place, Wally would be brimming over – shedding tears of joy because his whole family was together in the Presence of the Lord.

Well, for Wally, the times for tears are over. He is rejoicing in the heavenly chorus, receiving God's gifts with no more hurt, or sin, or any effects of sin in him. His is an eternity of bliss in the Father's House. That is so because Wally, for over seven decades, knew the way into that House. He believed, confessed, and over the years taught in his home through words and actions, that Jesus' words like these were for all who will hear:

Let not the heart of all of you be troubled. All of you continue to believe in the God, also into Me you all must continue to believe.⁵

With those words of Jesus, Wally is encouraging you all today to believe that Jesus is only Way to the Father in heaven. In them, we learn that

⁴ Romans 1:16.

⁵ John 14:1.

God sees His people as having one heart. That is, in Christ we have one center of being, from which we who are in Christ are as united as one.

With this day's proclamation about the nicest Man, Jesus, the Anointed One of God, you are being given the power of God to have joy in sorrow, hope in loss, and strength in weakness. The Lord knows that when He calls one of the members of His earthly household finally into His heavenly home, those of us left under death's dark vale will mourn. He desires us to not grieve as those do who have no hope, but rather to have the Promise of the God Who never lies, declared in words such as these:

In the House of My Father many rooms remain; and if not, would I have said such to all of you: that I continue to go to have prepared (a) place for all of you?"⁶

One of the reasons that you are in this particular House of the Lord today for the Funeral Service on behalf of Wallace Pflug is because almost five years ago, God used another Memorial Service in this place to draw here Wally and Flo. When a long-time acquaintance of theirs entered into the Father's House that April, the Pflugs were in the congregation on his day of remembrance. They discussed that which they had heard, sung, and that which was remembered that April 25 on their way home to Saddlebrooke. Then, in the days and weeks after, they began attending the Lord's Sunday services here. Finally, by the first week of the last month of that year, they gave their oath to become members of this congregation.

Wally and Flo, through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the purely proclaimed Word here, recognized that this would likely be their final earthly Church home. God knew what He was doing in bringing them through those doors. We have been blessed by their presence, and, according to the family, they were blessed by ours. Through similar circumstances in which God drew Wally and Flo here a few years ago, the Holy Spirit has drawn you here today. God has led you here to hear His Word, fulfilled in Wally and Flo, and the Word through which He determines to work His will in, for, and through you. God desires that you hear and believe that which Jesus now proclaims into you:

If I may have gone and I may have prepared (a) place for all of you, again I continue to come and I will take all of you alongside with Myself, that where I remain also all of you may continue to be.⁷

Jesus, through His means, has come to take Wally with Himself, that where Jesus remains, Wally will continue to be. For each one who continues to call upon the Name of God, in Christ Jesus in the Faith, there will come a day in

⁶ John 14:2.

⁷ John 14:3.

which he or she will be taken to be and remain with Jesus. That you might know that your day is coming, the Church celebrates days such as this. In days like this, in the funeral and memorial services of the Household of God on earth we celebrate, in muted joy, when one of our number has fallen asleep in Christ. We know they have passed fully from mortal life in the valley of the shadow of death into the fullness of eternal life in the heights of the Brilliance which has cast out death. Jesus declares to us of who cling to God in the Faith of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of all of our sins:

*Where I continue to go, all of you know the way.*⁸

It is at times of deepest grief, as well as at times of exceeding joy, that those who would be called the people of God may become confused. Our eyes do not show us that which are ears are hearing. We see a funeral pall hanging over ashes, and are reminded that we all are dust, and to the dust we shall return. We see the font, and hear that those ashes are near it to remind us that it is through Holy Baptism that we have already died and risen to new life in Christ. We struggle with the reality of the resurrection, even finding it difficult to have joy in the little things of this life. (That is why we see the jelly beans. They represent the wonder Wally expressed at experiencing such small things. Imagine the expression on his countenance as he beholds our Lord in the heavenly realms)! On the other hand, in our times of sorrow, on account of our real losses, we find ourselves doubting the very Word of God. In that, we are walking in the footsteps of Jesus' closest followers long ago, as one of whom who is rightly recorded as having said:

*O Lord, not we ourselves know where You continue to go; how do we have power the way to know for ourselves?*⁹

To such thinking, which is a result of sin, even the sin of grief which is lacking hope, Jesus responds with the eternal Word:

*I I AM the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes toward the Father except through Me.*¹⁰

Wally knew, believed, and confessed to the end of his earthly days that the reason he had a place in the Father's eternal house is on account of Jesus, and no work of his own. Wally, who reveled in work, while recovering from broken hip at Mountain View, said, "You know, Pastor, I gotta get a job." That is what the generation that brought him up knew - show your love and care for others by working well, by providing, even when you were down. Work is what he did, and loved, that he might care for and love others.

And, while he lived his life very productively, serving in management into the executive levels, when it came to the things of the Faith,

⁸ John 14:4.

⁹ John 14:5.

¹⁰ John 14:6.

Wally knew, believed, and taught that anyone who trusts that he earns God's grace by work truly does not trust the merit and grace of Jesus. Wally knew, even as he now knows, that one cannot find any way to God except through Jesus. Human strength is not enough. Money, power, fame, and family do not gain anyone entrance into the Father's House. Being the nicest man anyone knows is not sufficient to be let into God's eternal home.

That comes through Jesus, The Nicest Man. He makes it clear that He is, and remains, the only Way into the Father's House. In Jesus, the Son of God, Wally has entered fully into his room in God's mansion. Christ has borne him through death's shadows into the eternal light of Life.

To that truth, the Church proclaims: Christ, is risen! [Christ is risen indeed, Alleluia] And, because of that eternal truth the blessed ones who die in the Lord shall be raised from the dead.

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

Easter III, Saturday

Memorial Sermon in remembrance of God's grace for Wallace Roy Pflug

Psalm 23; Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 1:16-17; John 14:1-6

April 20, 2013

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

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