

IN NOMINE JESU

A HEART FOR SERVICE AT THE LORD'S TABLE

Our sermon for this Saturday in Pentecost Week, as white replaces red in this Chancel, is taken from our readings. White is the color of the Holy Trinity, and it is also the color reserved for use at the funeral services of those who fall asleep in the Faith. Hear again the Word of the One True God as it calls to our remembrance the Faith of Jesus. This describes that which the Holy Spirit brought forth in the Father's servant, Billie Woneda Shirley:

*The one doing the truth comes to the light, that the works of him may have appeared, because in God they are produced."*¹

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

Michael and Kevin, family and friends of Billie Shirley, God has gathered us here today to remember the gift of the Faith that He gave to His beloved daughter, Billie. This faith, the Faith of Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of the sins of the whole world, for you, God gave to her with the water and the Word in December, 1934. In the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, God gave His Name to a baby who, like all humans, had been conceived and born in sin. God took her and washed all sin from her. He gave her the gift of eternal blessed life. He created a hunger in her for the food of His Word.

Then, beginning on May 27, 1947, God sustained her with the food of immortality – the very Body and Blood of Jesus, her Savior from sin, death, and the devil. God moved her to receive Jesus regularly in His chosen means, how about you?

As God moved her to repeated reception of His gifts of forgiveness and strengthening to life everlasting, He produced many fruits of the Faith through her. In this congregation, for over twenty-three years, Billie shared that which God was doing in her in multiple ways. You may read or hear later of some of them. Even so, now, with the Table of the Lord before us adorned in white, with her mortal remains covered with a white pall reserved for only for those who fall asleep in the Faith, we will reflect for a brief time on how

¹ John 3:21.

God, through Billie Shirley, fulfilled these words:

The one doing the truth comes to the light, that the works of him may have appeared, because in God they are produced.”²

Here, around the Table of the Lord, is where God’s grace to and through saint Billie will continue to shine out in our midst for many years to come. In these images, we are free to remember the heart of service that God gave to Mrs. Shirley. Many of this congregation’s Altar Frontals, along with the crocheted Fair Linen, were either lovingly made, or carefully and critically approved by Mrs. Shirley. She was ever careful in watching over the adornments of the Lord’s Table, both in the Chancels and in the Naves of this congregation for over two decades.

The second telephone call a new pastor called to serve Christ to this congregation made in 1998 was to a woman whose work was doing the truth. In that not too brief conversation, Pastor and Altar Guild – she was the Altar Guild, (really a Sacristan without that title here for many years), before God raised up other faithful women to serve Him here – she and I discovered in joy that we had been taught the same respect for and desire to rightly use the things of God’s house to give God’s gifts in honorable and respectful ways to His people.

When asked whether the congregation had a common cup, a chalice, she responded in a manner like this, “Well, we have one, but a former pastor took it away. He gave us little plastic cups. The chalice is in the cupboard in the Sacristy.”

The pastor asked, “Do you think people would like it back as an option in which to receive the Lord’s Supper?” She responded, “Some would: I would.” So, it was immediately brought back into common use from this table.

When a discussion arose as to the sanitary use of that Chalice, raised by those who did not desire to use it, she had a frank and bold response. (No surprise there!) This is how her words were burned long ago into my mind and my heart: “The Lord’s cup holds no poison! (She may or may not have heard that the blessed St. John

² John 3:21.

the Evangelist and Apostle stated something similar to that when nefarious people apparently tried to poison him with the Lord's Cup). Billie also followed up that good confession about Whose Cup it is and Whose Blood it contains with this firm statement, "Even if I could get sick from drinking from the Common Cup, God will bring that illness to His, and my glory!" Today, we recall He has fully delivered her into His glory.

That bold and courageous statement of the Faith, I am certain, was given to her by God. It is declared in the light of day to you. Now thoughts move forward from long ago unto just a few weeks ago. Some seventeen years after she made those bold confessions of the Faith, Billie's son, Kevin, along with Dr. Roni Grad, witnessed her resolve to receive the Lord's Supper in a hospital room at UMC, Diamond North!

She lived among us in the light of Christ. She had been given a heart for service. That was shown clearly in her desire to honor the means which Jesus would use to serve His gifts to her family, and that includes her Church family. His light has been shining throughout the years through the good deeds He did through her. In that Light, she produced works of the Truth, for they were done in Christ. Jesus still declares of those who remain His saints on earth:

*The one doing the truth comes to the light, that the works of him may have appeared, because in God they are produced."*³

All of that truth doing is based, dear ones in Christ, in that which God has done for the world; in that which is believed upon in Christ; in that which is given by God to those whom He calls by His Name. For it is an eternal Truth that God Himself is Truth. In Him is no deceit, no lie, and no sin of any kind.

This you may know in part, as Billie now knows fully, that Jesus is the Truth. He is the Sacrificial Love of God Who came from the heavens to be one with us sinners. He did so to take our sins, your sins, upon Himself. He carried them onto the cross, and into the grave, for you! He even speaks to you, reminding you of those truths in words which, for those of us who have not rejected the prompting of the Holy Spirit, words which declare Who He is, and in what

³ John 3:21.

images He may be seen:

*No one ascended into the heavens except the One from the heavens [Who] descended. And, as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, thus it is necessary to be lifted up, the Son of Man, that everyone, the one continually believing, in Him may continue to have life eternal.*⁴

When you look to the image of Christ-crucified, hanging on the cross here on the pulpit to ensure our pastors preach the Word of God's forgiveness, or on the cross there on the processional Crucifix used to remind us that Jesus comes to be with His people in Word and Sacrament, you are free to behold the Truth that motivated our sister in the Faith to practice the good deeds she did. Because of the honor Jesus bestowed on her, in dying for her, she attended to the things that honored Him, and His people.

From her tradition of regularly bringing fresh cut flowers - "They show the beauty and fragility of life." -- to ensuring and teaching how the Table of the Lord is prepared and is to be attended to, the works of Billie's loving hands endure.

The Faith God gives is shown in attention to the little things - not just in the Church, but in one's daily life calling. Many people have commented on the beauty which may be found Christ's bloody death for sinners, and the hope is poured forth from it that this silver image of Christ portrays. Few know that this was produced by our now fully sainted sister using a lost-wax technique after the first plain metal image broke. A decade of almost daily wear for the whole world to see, a year in Iraq being dragged into and out of a uniform, took its toll. One of his arms snapped.

Well, that could not be tolerated. Everyone who knows the narrative of the Lord's crucifixion understands that not one of His bones was broken. Billie took that broken icon of God's love. She returned it stronger than ever through her worldly vocation. Since then, among many things, this image has brought an exclamation from a young woman who had been taught of a Jesus other than the Jesus of the Scriptures: "My, that looks painful!" Yes, it was, and He bore all that pain into death for you! God still declares through the Word Incarnate:

⁴ John 3:13-15.

For thus God sacrificially loved the [fallen] world, that the Son, the only-begotten One, He gave, that everyone, the one continually believing, in Him will not perish, but may continue to have life eternal.⁵

Those words you may see referenced in citations of *John* 3:16 on T-shirts, on signs, at sporting events, and when various tragedies happen. Even so, those who have received the light of God in Christ know their deeper meaning, which that translation declares. That is, the Faith is God's gift given in the death of Jesus.

Yet it is a gift which humans are free to reject, or neglect, or discard. For those who remain believing throughout their lives, the eternal life Jesus won remains theirs. Such was most certainly true for our sainted sister in Christ.

Billie Shirley has entered fully into God's rest. She has received the fulfillment of that which He began in her as she was washed with water combined with God's Word. God kept her in the Faith, through His faithfulness in the Word. In His giving her Jesus Body and Blood – for forgiveness for her daily sins – God strengthened her for eternal life until her last day came. Today in Christ, Billie reclines in the full peace of God. He kept her attentive to His Table for so many years. Jesus says:

The one continually believing in Him will not be judged...⁶

God's judgements against her have been taken away, forever, in the death of Jesus. As He was raised from the dead, so shall those ashes be raised. Since Jesus dwells in a glorified Body with the Father, so will Billie Shirley dwell with God on the Last Day and forever.

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

Funeral Sermon: Billie Wonedá Shirley

Pentecost Saturday

Psalm 23; Proverbs 30:4-5; Hebrews 11:13-19; John 3: 13-21

May 30, 2015

SOLI DEO GLORIA

⁵ *John* 3:16.

⁶ *John* 3:18a.