

## A CONTINUING LIFE OF SERVICE IN CHRIST

Our sermon for this day the Church in this place has chosen to remember the Faith that God gave to His servant Nancy Fitch has been developed from the Epistle to the Romans. Hear the Word of the Lord:

*But, in all these things, we all remain super-conquerors on account of the One having sacrificially loved us.<sup>1</sup>*

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

Scott, Patty, Stephanie; family, and friends of Nancy Jo (Edwards) Fitch, we are called to remember this day that in Christ, we are victors over all things. That reality includes death whose visible reminders are among us today. We are called to be reminded that that enemy has been conquered as we behold the images of the Victor's triumph on this pulpit, next to the Lord's Table, and on the walls of this building. These remain true images of our victory in Christ over death, even though we may not feel very much like conquerors.

Such visible representations of the Truth of God's Word are placed to remind us that, in the midst of genuine human loss, we are free to have hope. You see, we are called to more than wish for comfort in our time of loss. We have been gathered together by God this day that we might receive again the sure and certain hope which is given by God in the proclamation of the resurrection of the blessed dead.

Please hear this clearly: Christ Jesus has been raised from the dead, to the glory of God the Father. His tomb was, and is, empty. Hundreds of eye-witnesses beheld Him, over a period of forty days, as alive in the Body following His horrible death on the cross for the whole world's sins.

On account of those eternal realities, we are free to declare and remember that our sister in Christ will be raised from the dust of death at the heavenly trumpet's call

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:37.

on the Last Day. She will, with all the holy ones who have fallen asleep in Christ, be raised to eternal life. God will give her a new physical and spiritual glorified body.

That is all true because God has fulfilled His earthly work in, for, and through Saint Nancy. He has kept her in the good confession of the Faith. He did that throughout the days of her mortal life through the gifts He poured lavishly upon her out of His sacrificial love. From the moment He gave her new life in the water and Word of Holy Baptism, God began to daily use His Word to return her to that washing. As she confessed her sins, God returned her to His baptismal promises, by pronouncing His forgiveness to her. As she grew in knowledge of the treasures of the Faith, God brought her time and again to receive forgiveness and strengthening to eternal life through receiving Him in the Sacrament of the Altar.

Through the Word of God such as you have heard today, God the Holy Spirit gave Nancy certain hope even in her darkest days. In words repeated today, which were also read during the funeral service for her beloved Rolland, that same Spirit has been poured out upon you. The Holy Spirit yearns to lead us to hear hope anew as St. Paul declares God's Truth:

*For I have been persuaded that neither death nor life; neither angels nor rulers; neither things at hand nor things to be; nor powers; neither height nor depth; nor any different created thing will have power to separate us from the sacrificial love of God, that which is in Christ Jesus the Lord of us.<sup>2</sup>*

Such truths Nancy Fitch confessed for herself in this life. She was often heard to recount examples of how God had given her peace and hope amidst life's struggles. This she did in casual conversations, in congregational and private Bible studies and even in immediate responses to the preaching of the Word of God.

Thank God Mrs. Fitch did not need to be persuaded of God's unconditional love through the ways He convinced the man who composed the Letter to the Romans. He was once a committed killer of those who followed Christ. On the other hand, Nancy,

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:38-39

in her vocation as Nurse, gave Christ to many infants in hospital nurseries through Holy Baptism. She recoiled and refused from assisting in the murder of preborn humans.

Paul, then called Saul, was blinded by the Light of Christ. He was led about with scales over his eyes. Those remained upon him until God's Word gave him absolution. From that forgiveness, God gave him a commission to preach Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sins to those who did not know Jesus.

Our sister, when she went by the name of Nancy Jo Edwards, beheld the Light of Christ. She was not blinded by the Light. Rather she was saved by Him through the washing of regeneration and renewal. She freely received His blood-bought forgiveness and began a continuing life of service in Christ. Even to the day before she fell asleep in the Lord she continued to share the love of God in Christ Jesus with other people. All of that and more was her response to God's work in her. Such good work was promised to flow forth for believers in the opening words of this day's Letter:

*For we ourselves know that, for the ones continually sacrificially loving God, all things continue to work together for good for the ones (who are) being called according to His purpose.<sup>3</sup>*

As she fulfilled her life callings in the Lord, Nancy did experience life's struggles. These included the human loss of her beloved Rolland, times of deep depression and various physical challenges and illnesses. Yet, the Word of God persuaded her continually that He was with her.

Compare those realities to that which St. Paul, in His work in Christ Jesus, suffered. He endured beatings, a stoning, shipwrecks, and dangers everywhere he traveled. He was persecuted by Jews and non-Jews alike, and so much more. From those life and death realities, he most assuredly confessed that he had *been persuaded... that nothing will have power to separate us from the sacrificial love of God... in Christ Jesus.*

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:28.

Now, as Nancy reclines in the full glory of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, she knows in full the complete meaning of St. Paul's inspired words. God's Word sustained her in the Faith throughout her mortal life. His Word gives her life in Christ even though her mortal remains have gone the way of all flesh. Now, in our time of loss, God's Word offers hope to the faithful:

*But, in all these things, we all remain super-conquerors on account of the One having sacrificially loved us.<sup>4</sup>*

On days like this, with a loss like ours, we are not likely to readily grasp our elevation to the status of super-conquerors. The fact that we have responded to God's call to attend this funeral service means that we are experiencing some form of human grief. Some of you may have come here for what some in the medical profession call, "closure." Others are here to share life memories. Still others may be present to hear of good things about our departed sister in the Faith. You may choose to participate in the sharing of such things and more during the fellowship time after the Lord's service to us concludes. That will be fine, and perhaps helpful.

But, God knows what you truly need at times like this. He gives you His firm and certain Word. In that, He declares His sacrificial love for you. This is what God has determined that you need to hear, know, and believe in the midst of your loss:

*What then will we say to these things? If God (is) for us, who (is) against us? Certainly (He) Who His own Son did not spare, but for us all handed Him over, how will He definitely not also with Him graciously give to us all things?<sup>5</sup>*

God's Word of hope to you at this time is that He is on your side. Neither death, nor sin, nor the devil can have ultimate victory for you who remain in Christ Jesus. God has declared and displayed the reality that He is on your team in the fight against all the human, spiritual and other powers and principalities who daily beset you.

God paid the ultimate price to win the victory over sin, death and hell for you. To defeat death's hold on you, the Father gave the Son into death. That means that

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:37.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:31-32.

God both knows and understands grief. The eternal Father gave, out of His love, His only-begotten Son into a brutal murder. That He eternally remembers, for you.

God knows the power of death. In the Son, He took it on in our flesh. He felt the whip, the nails, and the rough wood of the cross which tormented his torn, bruised, and bleeding flesh. Now, whenever He looks at the palms of His hands, He remembers the price He paid – to assuage the Father’s wrath at sin – your sin. He beholds the marks of the victory He won for you on death’s dread instrument. Make no mistake, dear ones in Christ: He who imposed death as the punishment for sin was the only One who could take its eternal sting away.

Because of the Son of God’s death in the world’s sin, which includes your sins, He was raised from the dead. The central event in all of creation history – the death of Jesus – meant that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead would occur. Those who believe that Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day, you who are of the Faith, are declared right with God the Father. Hear again this eternal truth:

*Christ was raised from the dead, first fruit of the ones having fallen asleep!*<sup>6</sup>

First fruit is a biblical title given to the initial produce from humanly edible plants. In terms of God’s Holy Law, it was to be given by the faithful back to God. This called for trust that He would continue to provide more of the same.

Those of us who have planted orange trees know the joy that comes from seeing the first fruit of the tree sometime in its first three years. Now, think of giving to the Church all the fruit that first comes off that tree. You would certainly hope and trust that the tree would continue to produce.

The Holy Spirit uses the practice of the first fruit offering of God’s people of old to describe God’s first fruit gift offering of His Son. That is to show the faithful that Jesus is God’s first fruit offering. The fact that Jesus was bodily resurrected from the dead means that all of those who die in Him will be raised in the body to new life.

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20.

For us today, that truth brings comfort in the knowledge and belief that the dust that rests in the containers under the white pall next to the font will be changed in an instant into new glorified bodies. As the final harvest is brought by God's angels into His eternal kingdom, God will bring them forth. All the external and internal evidence of Jesus' resurrection, irrefutable for almost 2,000 years now, means that God will raise our dear sister (and her beloved husband) from the dead. In Christ, in hope, we await that Day.

Amen, come, Lord Jesus.

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

Trinity XI, Saturday

Funeral Service for Nancy Jo Edwards Fitch

Romans 8:28-39; Psalm 23; I Corinthians 15:12-22, 51-58; John 14:1-6

August 22, 2015

*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

*Soli Deo Gloria*