

In Nomine Jesu

**HEARING JESUS' VOICE:
FOLLOWING HIM INTO LIFE ETERNAL**

Our sermon for this second Friday of the Epiphany season is taken from our readings. This special time of year is when we remember God's love in appearing in our flesh to save all people. Today, He comes to us through His Word in this time of recalling His calling Deborah Melody Cowles to eternal life in Christ. Hear the Word again as we remember the Faith God gave and kept her in:

For, if we believe that Jesus died and rose, even so God will lead together with Him the ones having fallen asleep through Jesus.¹

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

Bill, William, Craig, Penny, family and friends of Debbie Cowles, God has gathered us here today to remember the gift of the Faith that He gave to His beloved daughter, Debbie. I testify to you that she is one of God's elect. That means that she is His child chosen by Him before He laid the foundations of this world, or even began His creative work.

Her election to salvation is not due to any good work she did in this mortal life. Rather it is because of God's grace and mercy for her. On account of that, throughout her mortal life, God gave her His gifts which she truly learned to treasure.

We may know that to be true because of the fruits of the Faith Deborah continued to exhibit even as her health failed. God moved her to continue to hear the Good News of Jesus – His death in her sins and His

¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

bodily resurrection to eternal life. She believed on Christ as her Lord and Savior. She prayed and gave thanks for His gifts.

As a result of God's Word working faith in her, Debbie displayed His love throughout her life. This she did through teaching Sunday school in her younger years. It included studying and confessing in the year of our Lord 2004, that she would remain steadfast in our Christian confession and Church unto death. She continued sharing the treasures of the Faith, as she was able, with others in her last years and months of mortal life. She rejoiced in receiving the touch of Jesus through His Word and His Supper in her home.

Further, it is a reality that the last time she received God's gifts in this place was during the funeral service of another member of this congregation. She rejoiced in the Faith as she, and we, remembered the Faith she shared with a dear sister in Christ, with whom she had remained in phone contact these past few years.

Now, with all those who have fallen asleep in the Faith, in Jesus, they are reunited eternally. You may find comfort in the truth that, whenever you come to the Lord's Table, those who rest in Christ are on the other side. In their midst, among them reclines our sister Debbie. All of them, in their mortal lives, were beheld faithful in hearing Jesus' Voice as they followed Him into life eternal. They no longer need to regularly receive Christ's forgiveness – either in Word or His Holy Supper, for they are now without sin. Jesus says,

The sheep, the ones (who are) mine, My Voice they hear, and I

*know them and they follow Me, and I give to them life eternal, and definitely not will they be lost into the aeons; and no one will snatch them from My Hand.*²

Debbie has followed Jesus from life into life. You may be certain that she heard His Voice, especially in these past few years. Each month or so, we gathered together around a snack table in the Cowles' living room. There, following conversations that often centered upon life, family, friends and health, we would hear God's Word. Then, though her trembling hands could not hold the bread nor the cup, she received the touch of Jesus through human hands. God came to her in simple elements, forgave her sins, relieved her doubts, and strengthened her to life everlasting.

Please understand: God called our sainted sister to the Faith. Through His Word, proclaimed into her ears over the years in various Christian congregations, God kept her in the Faith. Now, she has received fully that which she for so long awaited – blessed eternal life in Christ Jesus. From life to life, God taught her that He has done all that was necessary to grant her that wonderful gift.

Truly, today, we whom God has gathered here are free to rejoice, in this time of earthly sorrow, that Saint Deborah was not snatched from Jesus' nail-pierced hands. It is true that she is no longer with us in the body except as an empty vessel which will be held safe until the Last Day.

Even so, she is alive in Christ. God, Who has revealed it is His will that He never lie, has declared in the bodily resurrection of Jesus that those

² John 10:27-28.

who continue to hear His Voice in mortal life will live into the unending aeons of His grace. That is one reason that appears to lie behind the God-breathed Word of St. Paul which is declared again to grant you comfort and peace in this time of loss:

If we believe that Jesus died and rose, even so God will lead together with Him the ones having fallen asleep through Jesus.³

Those words do leave open the possibility that some who hear them will not believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That is truly sad. Even so, the eyewitness testimony of those events, from multiple sources, over much time, leaves a sure confession that Jesus lived, died, rose from the dead and ascended into the heavens. The fact that many allowed themselves to be put to death for their confession of Jesus as Lord over death and life (as many still are doing in parts of our world today) is due to the truth that God's testimony is real. We believe, teach and confess that Jesus died to destroy death's hold on the faithful. He rose to new life to give us eternal life in bliss. God calls to you now to not be distressed as those who have no hope in His Word of promise. God still says to you that which Deborah knows even now to be true:

Until your old age I am He, and until your gray hairs, I will carry you! I have done (it), and I will bear (you); I will carry (you), and I will save (you).⁴

Those whom Jesus calls and leads in this life through His Word will receive His promises. Whatever life trials may come; God will bear you up.

³ 1 Thessalonians 4:14.

⁴ Isaiah 46:4.

Debbie's life is a testimony to that. Why even in the moments of her death, witness to the comfort that comes from knowing Jesus was shared beyond her hospital room. Bill and William can speak to you of that which God allowed another family to hear and receive because of human circumstances that surrounded her passing from life into life.

Suffice it to say for now, that the comfort of the Word which our beloved sister in Christ treasured so many years, was declared to others, including those who had become estranged from the Faith. They heard that God bore Deborah Melody Cowles through her trials into the sleep that is death for the Christian. They learned of the comfort that comes from commending one's soul into the hands of the Lord. These words became real for them in their time of loss, as they are declared to be for you now:

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

Funeral Sermon: Deborah Melody (Alexander) Cowles

Epiphany I, Friday

Psalm 23; Isaiah 46:4; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; John 10:27-29

January 15, 2016

Solī Deo Glōria