

TIME FOR BLIND FAITH

Sandra and Bill, Lonnie and Beth, family and friends of Alvin White:

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

Our sermon for this day the Church in this place has chosen to remember the Faith that God has given to His servant Alvin August White is drawn from the Scriptures we have just heard. Some of those words he heard at the Last Lord's Service to him in his home last Sunday. In sharing the Word of the Lord in Alvin's bedroom that day, a gift was given to another man and his family.

That gift is the Word of God, such as you have heard and will yet sing today. It is the major part of the means of grace which God used to sustain and keep Alvin in the good confession of Christ. This God did from the time Al rode a pony to hear Church services outside the white church building in Gardena. That was where he made a vow – in seeing the mothers and fathers with their children – to have his own wife and family who would come and go together to and from the Lord's Services. It is where he was baptized and confirmed in the Faith sometime after the pastor first had noted him outside and then invited him into the Church.

From that time on, God brought Alvin into the Faith. God granted him a wife and family. Through good times and bad, God through the Word of the Faith, held Al close to Jesus through the Scriptures. The Word of God that keeps a man in the Faith came last in this life to Al as the Church served Christ to him in his home in the services of the Word on this past Saturday and Sunday. Hear again the Word of the God's peace for those who call upon Him in the Faith:

Therefore, since we remain (the ones) having been justified through faith, we continue to have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...¹

Words such as those which give confidence to the faithful had been, for

¹ Romans 5:1.

years, proclaimed in the White home. That is where Alvin, and before Vera fell asleep in the Lord, where both of them, heard of God's grace. In addition to their daily devotions to the Word of God, those times came when the Church arrived in their home as they could no longer attend the Lord's Services in His House in this place. Al and Vera had received reminders that they were at peace with God thousands of times in the more than 68 years they were given to spend together in Christian marriage.

Following that time, while he was apart from Vera for the past three years, Alvin reclined and rejoiced in the peace which he had in the Lord. He said more than once, "What a special thing it is for a fellow, that when he can't go to Church, the Church comes to him." The peace of God which comes from knowing that in Jesus he was right with God often moved Alvin to a such confident boast in the Lord. Almost every time in his home when the Lord's Service in the Sacrament of the Altar was received by him, up to the latest on Tuesday, March 4, Alvin had something to say about that which God was doing for him. Yes, he would usually comment during the sermon. He would add a reflection or two from the text which showed his understanding of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

Yet, it was at the end of the Lord's Service, following the benediction – the ancient words with which God places his blessing on those whom He gathers around His Word and Sacraments (as you will hear today) – that Alvin really wanted to respond to that which God had just done for him. Over the years, he would reach out and grasp our hands. Then he would recite with faith the post-communion prayer he learned while studying for his Rite of Confirmation in 1938. Much of that learning for that event, he told us from time-to-time, was done as he was riding on the tractor, working the fields. Over the past couple of years, Al would often look up from receiving God's blessing and say, "Can I say the prayer? I don't know if I can remember it all, but I want to try." When told "Yes, though I don't have that one memorized. However, I know enough to help if you get stuck," he would offer to God

the sacrifice of prayer with words such as these:

Blessed Savior, Jesus Christ, Thou hast given Thyself to us in this holy Sacrament. Keep us in Thy faith and favor that we may live in Thee as Thou livest in us. May Thy Body and Thy Blood preserve us in the True Faith unto life everlasting.

Such a prayer of the one who knows peace with God comes through most clearly to the believer when he or she believes that we are declared right with our heavenly Father. This “rightness,” which is called, “justification,” is a gift of God. It comes to anyone only through the perfect Sacrifice that God made on our behalf. You see, God gave His only-begotten Son into death, in our sins, so that we do not have to die in them. Our justification before God the Father is simply this: Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. That you believe that is a gift of God. It is Faith in realities unseen. It brings hope in the Promise(s) of God. Such hope is worked in the faithful by God through His chosen means, which are all tied to His Word. That means that the following words are for those, who, like Saint Alvin August White, know we *have peace through God in our Lord Jesus Christ,*

through Whom we also have access (by the Faith) into this grace in which we stand, and we also continue to confidently boast in (the) hope of the glory of God.²

Alvin had access into God’s grace in full measure in his mortal life. On account of that grace, he now fully lives in eternal life in Jesus Christ. Even so, Al, with all the faithful who fall asleep in the Lord, awaits the resurrection of his body. When our Lord returns on the clouds with power and glory, Alvin’s body will be raised in a glorified and perfect state. His spirit and body will be joined by the Word of God. He will, with all the faithful, live forever before our heavenly Father in everlasting peace with God and all of the then restored, cleansed, and renewed creation.

We can declare that to be true for Alvin because he was baptized into the

² Romans 5:2.

Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He has God's family Name! From that time, God worked the good confession of the Faith in Saint Alvin, all the way until his mortal days were done. Through the confidence that comes from knowing whose child one is – even if he could not remember his earthly mother – a man can then live in God's glory in the midst of earthly pressures. One is built up in knowing that one's *help comes from the Lord Who made heaven and earth.*³ The knowledge and belief anyone, like Al when faced with moving away from the family farm; or the loss of the love of his life; or his health struggles these past few years, can bear up under the pressures of this world in the Faith of Jesus Christ is what our theme text for today declares:

And not only that, but we continue to confidently boast in tribulations, knowing that tribulation continues to produce patient endurance; and patient endurance, approved character; and approved character, hope; and hope does not continue to put to shame...⁴

That one long sentence basically sums up the attitude which the Faith worked in our brother, friend, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather. We are remembering today the Faith which brought hope to our brother Alvin, who at a young age experienced tribulations. From the death of his mother when he was three years old, to being passed between an aunt and a grandmother, Alvin learned something very important. A boy who grew into a man with such a beginning could have come to other conclusions about why all that happened. God moved Alvin to see from his loss of a mother – whom he seemed to remember only a few weeks ago as the pain in his body increased – God granted our friend the gift of passing on to his family how important the calling of “mother” is to a family.

Out of the pressures of his boyhood, Alvin learned to patiently endure hardship. As the prime cook for his father and brothers as they tried to eke out a living from the earth during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl years, Alvin learned the

³ Psalm 121:2.

⁴ Romans 5:3-5a.

importance of work in the home. When he had earned his eighth-grade diploma (though in the past few years he in humility would only claim six years completed) he learned to take his place in the fields. This built him up in the once-valued by many American, and still valued by some of us, character of hard work, discipline, and faithfulness to vocation and family. God used that when he led Alvin to ride the pony to the little white Church (the actual building pictured on our bulletins) to hear the preaching and singing, and to see the families coming to and from the Lord's Services.

God took the good character built from patient endurance born out of the pressures of this life, and gave Alvin, with the support of Vera, the will to move away from the family farm. God gave him hope to head west to a new job when struggles seemed to have taken it all away. (I can tell you that he told me he did not look back to Gardena as he left. Yet he said he did cry for a short time as he passed the little white Church the last time to leave that life behind). He moved on in blind faith, faith which "sees" God's promises, as he trusted in the Lord to give him that which he needed for his family, this life, and for all time. That faith he worked to pass on to his children.

Through the years, in pressures which would have beat down a man without faith, God gave Alvin the strength to move forward in faith. Faith truly beholds God's will to bring good to those who call upon His name. Al's desire was that you, like he, might trust in the Lord to work all things to the good, even if it takes decades for you to arrive at the eternal good! That is because, out of the love of God in Christ Jesus, Alvin knew these words to be true for those who, like him, have the hope which does not put to shame:

Because the sacrificial love of God has been poured out in our hearts through (the) Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.⁵

It was on account of God's love for Alvin August White that he accomplished so many good things in this life. The Holy Spirit, given to him with the

⁵ Romans 5:5.

water and Word of Holy Baptism, was ever with him. As a father, the Spirit moved him to pray that his children and their families would be kept in the Faith until their last days. (He told me some time ago, not out of sadness or depression, but in faith, that he was ready to die in the Lord anytime. Such faith he wants for you). Al knew of God's sacrificial love in sending His Son Jesus to die for him. Alvin believed in that eternal truth to and through his last day in this fallen world.

Now, Mr. White has received that which he has longed for, that which through tribulation, patient endurance, good character, and hope God kept in him. God had prepared eternal life for him before the foundation of the world was cast down. Therefore, we can look back and declare that God moved throughout his life in a now sainted Alvin to keep him faithful in receiving the treasures of the Faith. It was those gifts that just days ago led him from this life fully into the true peace of God found only in the eternal Presence of God. It is that Presence Who is here now in the proclamation and hearing of these words of truth:

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

Saturday of Lent II

Funeral Service for Alvin A. White

Psalm 23, 121; Genesis 32:22-32; Romans 5:1-5; Matthew 15:21-28

March 22, 2014

Pastor Michael H. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

Romans 5:1-5, Second Translation:

We, having been justified then from Faith peace we continue to have with the God through the LORD of us Jesus Christ through Whom also the access we have (by the Faith) into the grace this in the One we stand and we continue to have confidence in hope of the glory of the God of Whom alone also but we continue to have confidence in the tribulations knowing that the tribulation patient endurance continues to produce and the patient endurance approved character and the approved character hope and the hope not continues to put to shame because the sacrificial love of the God has been poured out in the hearts of us through Spirit Holy of the One having been given to us.

Romans 5:1-5, Third Translation:

Therefore, since we remain having been justified through faith, we continue to have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,⁶ through Whom we also have access (by the Faith) into this grace in which we stand, and we also continue to confidently boast in (the) hope of the glory of God.⁷ And not only that, but we continue to confidently boast in the tribulations, knowing that tribulation continues to produce patient endurance;⁸ and patient endurance, approved character; and approved character, hope;⁹ and hope does not continue to put to shame, because the sacrificial love of God has been poured out in our hearts through (the) Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.¹⁰

⁶ Romans 5:1.

⁷ Romans 5:2.

⁸ Romans 5:3.

⁹ Romans 5:4.

¹⁰ Romans 5:5.