

February 3, 2010

SOLI DEO GLORIA
For the Funeral of Joan Ilene Arceri

Good Shepherd, Novi

REVELATION 21:1-5
BEHOLD! I AM MAKING EVERYTHING NEW.

In the name + of Jesus.

The Apostle John was sitting on a barren island in the Aegean Sea. He had been banished and forsaken. He was at the mercy of wicked men who desired wicked things. They did not care if he died out there. In the midst of his suffering, Jesus Christ appeared to him to give him a startling revelation.

Though you are not banished to a barren island, you are suffering from one of the evils in this world. In fact, it is one of the most bitter and grieving evils there is – the death of a loved one. You could not stop it. You cannot ignore it. But in the midst of your suffering and grieving, Jesus Christ has given you a revelation to console you. We give our attention to that revelation which St. John recorded for us.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” (Revelation 21:1-5)

We still live in the old order of things, filled with death, mourning, crying, and pain. The old order exists because sin entered the world and ruined everything. Sin marked Joan too. You saw it in her as her health deteriorated over the years. You saw it in her with her frustrations and sorrows. You also saw in it her, revealed by her own sins. Sin marked and corrupted Joan Arceri. Though the cause of death on her death certificate may say something like “renal failure,” sin is the reason she died; **for the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)**

These things were no secret to Joan, either. She confessed her sins regularly. She knew that death awaited her. But she was not afraid to die. That is because God had revealed to her what was awaiting her upon her death. God had made Joan wise for salvation. He had shown her the Savior who has taken up our sin and rescued us from its eternal consequences. He had shown her the Savior who suffered her punishment, who forgives sins, and who gives us hope even in the face of death. This is the Savior who spoke to St. John and said, **“Behold! I am making everything new.” (Revelation 21:5)**

St. John saw God’s new creation. He described it as **“the new Jerusalem ... prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” (Revelation 21:2)** Jesus is the Groom, and his Bride is the Church. The Church stands before God beautifully dressed. Now, the only thing God sees as beautiful is that which is holy. But Joan had confessed she was a sinner; so where is her hope? It is in Jesus. He replaced her sinful rags with garments of salvation. This is what the Lord says, **“All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” (Galatians 3:27)** And so

when Joan was baptized, Jesus cleansed her of all sin. He clothed her in his own holiness. Behold! He made everything new. That is where Joan found her comfort and her salvation.

As you children had gathered around her in her final days, she commented that she tried to be a good mother to you. I'm sure the sentiments were the same for everyone – that she tried to be a good wife, a good grandma, a good friend, and a good Christian. No doubt, you remember all of the kind and loving things she did. I'm sure you remember her fondly. But her comment also shows why she needed a Savior. She *tried* to be good. Trying is not holy obedience; and she knew it. I'm sure she remembered times when she let you down. We all have regrets when death comes – what we wanted to do or say; what we could have done better; what we wish we take back or do over. But our regrets and our excuses don't fix anything.

Jesus does not let us be consumed by regrets or excuses or guilt. He grants us forgiveness. He does not let us sweat it out, trying to figure out if all our trying will be good enough. He assures us that we will not be judged based on our efforts. If we were, our regrets would haunt us and our sins would condemn us. Jesus' perfect life meets all of God's demands for us. Jesus' crucifixion pays for all of our guilt. We have a Savior who wipes the slate clean, who silences all doubts and regrets, who gives us all that we need to enter heaven, who makes all things new.

“Behold! I am making everything new,” says Jesus. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain; for the old order of things has passed away. The Lord had made Joan a new creation in holy baptism. He dressed her beautifully in robes of righteousness. He marked her for salvation. He made his dwelling with her. And yet, she has passed away. While doctors and medicine may have granted her extra years in this world, they could not avert death. Her body, like yours, has been corrupted by sin. And since the wages of sin is death, the body finally had to die.

But that is not the last word. When Jesus came into our world, he became flesh so that he could redeem us, body and soul. The Son of God was put to death for all of our sins. He was buried to sanctify the grave. And finally, Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus' resurrection shows us that his payment for sins is complete. His resurrection shows us that he is Lord over death. Death will not hold us forever. Jesus will come on the Last Day and summon us from our graves. Jesus' is the firstfruits of the resurrection; just as he has risen, so will all who believe in him.

While these corrupted bodies must go to the grave, Jesus will make them new. At the resurrection of all mankind on the Last Day, Jesus will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. That means that Joan will be raised up with a body that is glorious and incorruptible. There will be no need for doctors, or prescriptions, or oxygen tanks. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain; for the old order of things will have passed away. Behold! Jesus will make all things new and glorious.

Jesus had come into this world – God dwelling with man. He came so that he could redeem us from a world of sin and pain. Jesus has done that. All who die in the Lord have their souls taken to heaven to enjoy the peace and perfection that is there. Then, on the Last Day, body and soul will be reunited. And then, Joan will have all that she prayed for – that body and soul, she will be forever free from sickness, pain, suffering,

grief, and stress, even death. The revelation that God gave to St. John and to Joan Arceri is yours too; for, *whoever* believes and is baptized will be saved.

“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” (Revelation 21:3) Jesus, who came to dwell with us for a while, will bring us to dwell with him forever. He will make all things new, and right, and perfect. And we, like Joan Arceri, will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.