

Funeral Service for Connie Giesen
Radford, VA
March 18, 2017

GATHERING

The Holy Spirit, the comforter, gathers us together.
We are gathered to worship,
around the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus,
to remember before God our *sister Connie Giesen*,
to give thanks for *her* life,
to commend *her* to the mercy of Jesus Christ,
and to comfort one another in our grief.

HYMN A Mighty Fortress

GREETING

The God of all mercy, who promises us that death does not have the last word, is with us today. We give thanks for your presence as well to comfort the family, to share in your morning, to celebrate Connie's life, and to hope together for reunion with all who've gone before us into eternity.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let's pray.
O God of grace and glory,
we remember before you today our *sister Connie*
We thank you for giving *her* to us to know and to love
as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth.
In your boundless compassion, comfort us who mourn.
Give us faith to see that death has been swallowed up
in the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ,
so that we may live in confidence and hope until, by your call,
we are gathered to our heavenly home in the company of all your saints;
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

READINGS

121 I raise my eyes toward the mountains.
Where will my help come from?

- 2** My help comes from the Lord,
the maker of heaven and earth.
- 3** God won't let your foot slip.
Your protector won't fall asleep on the job.
- 4** No! Israel's protector
never sleeps or rests!
- 5** The Lord is your protector;
the Lord is your shade right beside you.
- 6** The sun won't strike you during the day;
neither will the moon at night.
- 7** The Lord will protect you from all evil;
God will protect your very life.^[a]
- 8** The Lord will protect you on your journeys—
whether going or coming—
from now until forever from now.

John 14

14 "Don't be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. 2 My Father's house has room to spare. If that weren't the case, would I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you? 3 When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. 4 You know the way to the place I'm going."

5 Thomas asked, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him."

8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father; that will be enough for us."

9 Jesus replied, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I have spoken to you I don't speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me does his works. 11 Trust me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on account of the works themselves. 12 I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father. 13 I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. 14 When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

I met Connie for the first time while I was interviewing for the call at Christ Lutheran about two and a half years ago. Though she didn't know me, she raised up her eyes when I walked into her room, and her smile came quick. Goodness was it infectious. Her attitude and warmth drew me in, so I took the opportunity to continue visiting her since then, with each time being a bit different. As dementia took hold of her, recognition would wax and wane. Yet, though she didn't recognize me, each time she heard me say I was the pastor at Christ Lutheran Church, that smile returned, her eyes opened up, and her head rose, almost as if she was joining the writer of this Psalm and raising her eyes to the hills, to the mountains, looking to the God that she came to know in this church.

As we gather today here, we gather with many different emotions. We grieve for our loss. We celebrate the 88 years of life that Connie shared with us. We may experience some relief that her suffering is over. We also hear the words, from Jesus's mouth, "you know the place where I'm going," and by extension, the place where Connie's gone. Connie's gone, along with Jesus, into eternity with the fullness of God.

In death, we complete the journeys that we began in baptism. We don't often think about the imagery of baptism, at least not often enough, but baptism prepares us for death, for in it, our old life - the one that is determined by sin - is snuffed out, drowned in the waters of that holy fountain, and from the waters we rise in life, new life, Christ's life. As Romans and Colossians remind us, in baptism we die with Christ, so that, beyond our

death, we will rise again to new life in Christ. That's where Connie's gone, where the next step of the journey is, and where one day we will all find ourselves together with Connie, and Bill, and all those saints who've gone on before us: rising from the waters of death into the new light of God's Kingdom, where abundant and everlasting life is the natural course of things. .

One of the blessings of funerals is that we get to gather and commit to God our sister in Christ in a way that reflects her. That's why the family chose these hymns and these scriptures, even to have it in this place. We sing the songs that she loved to sing and would almost certainly sing better than we would, but we sing them to the God who holds us all together. We come dressed to honor her life, knowing that in life she would have shown up more put together than most any of us could ever hope to be. We gather in a place that her family helped to build so that we we might build a future of faith together, so that others may come to know the God who brought her spirituality such vibrance and flare.

As we commit Connie into God's care, we also remember that though she was good, she wasn't a perfect person, for none of us are perfect people. Connie, as the rest of us did, struggled as well as flourished. That, after all, is the human condition. But now, we also trust that her struggles are over, for beyond death, our faults and shortcomings are replaced by God's completeness, and by the love and joy found in God's presence. That's where Jesus goes and where Connie indeed has gone: to the place where God's perfection always completes what our imperfection could not.

The disciples' later reply to Jesus is this: "Lord, show us the Father. That will be enough for us." Show us God. That's enough. I'd bet that's why Psalm 121 was Connie's favorite psalm. She's raising her eyes to the hills, looking for God, looking for Israel's protector, looking for the maker of heaven and earth, the one who never sleeps or rests. Show us God. We, at our best, do just that: we show one another God. We reveal the divine dignity that's a part of humanity, that God gave to us in our creation. Over the past few days I was fortunate enough to hear from the kids how Connie, at her best, showed them God. In her music, singing of God's beauty. In her philanthropy, supporting God's vision for a world where everyone has enough. I got to talk with Ilene Crigler, a long time neighbor and even longer friend, about how in their antics together and in their vulnerability together, when they needed to help one another, how she saw God through Connie. Perhaps my favorite story was when, during the process of integration in Radford, when Connie confronted the powers that be when they tried to keep integrated basketball teams from playing in the city rec leagues. You want to see God in a mid-20th century white woman? Find her standing up to the people that she sees in the grocery store and at the Friday football games to ensure that all people in this city would have equal rights. The disciples ask Jesus to show God, and to the disciples, Jesus responds, you know what God looks like. Show God to the world through the life you lived. At her best, Connie did that.

But what we trust today is that God's love for Connie wasn't because of what she did, but because in Jesus God offers radical, inclusive love to everyone. What we also trust today is that our faith is most alive when our appreciation for that love overflows into

actions of compassion, of justice, of grace, into lives that show God to the world. Thank God for Connie, and thanks be to God for giving her to us as a partner in this life. We now join together in hope for the future, when we'll join together with God and Connie around that great heavenly banquet, where all the saints, from all their labors rest, join in singing. Something tells me that we'll hear Connie's voice amongst the choir, and that surely makes my heart smile. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession and the Lord's Prayer

Almighty God, in holy baptism you have knit your chosen people together into one communion of saints in the body of Christ.

Give to your whole church in heaven and on earth your light and your peace.

God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

Grant that all who have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection may die to sin and rise to share the new life in Christ.

God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

Give courage and faith to all who mourn,
and a sure and certain hope in your loving care,
that, casting all their sorrow on you,
they may have strength for the days ahead.

God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

Grant to us who are still in our pilgrimage, and who walk as yet by faith,
that, where this world groans in grief and pain,
your Holy Spirit may lead us to bear witness to your light and life.

God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

Help us, in the midst of things we cannot understand,
to believe and trust in the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection to life everlasting.

God of mercy,

hear our prayer.

Lord, remember us in your kingdom, and teach us to pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

COMMUNION

HYMN Amazing Grace

HYMN AFTER COMMUNION How Great Thou Art

Sending

May the God of peace, who through the Holy Spirit brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do God's will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in God's sight; through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever.
Amen.

Let us go in peace. Everyone is invited to follow the family to the gravesite at West View Cemetery for a brief service of committal.

COMMITTAL (NOT IN BULLETIN HANDOUTS)

We gather to commit the life of our sister Connie into the hands of the God of the universe. Grace and peace from our Savior Jesus Christ be with you all.

Let us pray.

Holy God, holy and powerful, by the death and burial of Jesus your anointed, you have destroyed the power of death and made holy the resting places of all your people. Keep our sister Connie, whose body we now lay to rest, in the company of all your saints. And at the last, O God, raise her up to share with all the faithful the endless joy and peace won through the glorious resurrection of Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Philippians 3:20-21

20 Our citizenship is in heaven. We look forward to a savior that comes from there—the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 He will transform our humble bodies so that they are like his glorious body, by the power that also makes him able to subject all things to himself.

In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God our *sister Connie*, and we commit *her* body to the earth, its resting place,

earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

The Lord bless *her* and keep *her*.

The Lord's face shine on *her* with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon *her* with favor and ☩ give *her* peace.

Amen.

Merciful God, you heal the broken in heart and bind up the wounds of the afflicted.

Strengthen us in our weakness, calm our troubled spirits,
and dispel our doubts and fears.

In Christ's rising from the dead,
you conquered death and opened the gates to everlasting life.

Renew our trust in you that by the power of your love
we shall one day be brought together again with our sister Connie.

Grant this, we pray, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
3 he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,[d]
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

Rest eternal grant *Connie*, O Lord; and let light perpetual shine upon *her*. O Lord, support us all the day long of this troubled life, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Almighty God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

Amen.

Let us go in peace. Please share signs of peace with one another as we depart.

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