

In Nomine Iesu

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“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

– **Psalm 23 (NKJV)**

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow redeemed, especially you Julaine, Ephraim, Carol, family, and friends:

You may wonder why the text chosen for today is the 23rd Psalm, when by centuries-old tradition it is already a part of nearly every Christian funeral. It’s because it is part not just of Paul’s funeral but of his entire life and death. Let me tell you how.

For Paul room number 6416 at the UW Medical Center ICU, well-lit, bright, amazingly clean, was the “valley of the shadow of death.” He knew it, even if we, his family, did not, could not, would

not. Just before he was put on the ventilator, he paused to recite word for word for his beloved wife Julaine, “The Lord is My Shepherd; I shall not want,” all the way through to, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

You see, among all the things he was - husband, father, son, brother, friend to many, faithful in all of them - Paul was a teacher at heart, and a good one. He understood what the phrase “**teachable moment**” is all about and how such moments are not to be wasted. So, he used that moment, as a good teacher does, to review for himself what he was about to teach for the great good of Julaine, Ephraim, and all of us here today; and for this he was given help, as Jesus promised to all who are His by faith when they stand in the face of mortal danger. He assured us, “do not worry about how and what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” (Luke 12:11-12) So, it seemed to me only right that I should share that moment with you his students, your parents, his fellow teachers, colleagues, and friends today.

Afterwards in the hours while Paul was intubated and not able to speak, only listen, Julaine read to him from a commentary on the 23rd Psalm they’d together used in the past. She did so to comfort him in the valley of the shadow of death. She lent me the book a couple of days ago to help me be

part of Paul's last hours. That is the first part of why this text was chosen.

It was only after Paul's death, when Julaine and her brother went through Paul's documents and papers that she came upon the worship folder for his confirmation service 28 years ago. The text of the sermon was - you guessed it - the 23rd Psalm. The pastor that day, his father Tom, wanted him and all the other confirmands to carry this psalm with them throughout their lives. This particular confirmand, Paul, did so. That is the second part of why the 23rd Psalm was chosen for this day - by whom I am not sure, but I tend to think it was more the Good Shepherd and the Holy Spirit He promised than any human being.

Dear students, parents, colleagues of Parkland Lutheran School, friends, both families, Carol, Ephraim, and especially you, Julaine, this place we call the sanctuary is just that. It is a place of safety and of rescue. It is so, because it has one great, overarching purpose, to proclaim Christ who was crucified for sinners, Christ the Savior of the world, Christ who is the resurrection and the life, the One who has defeated death for us, and given Paul and us the victory we celebrate this day even through our tears. This Savior is the Good Shepherd of the psalm Paul would teach us to look to for rescue with his last words. He is the One to whom David himself looked in faith as he wrote this psalm more than 3000 years ago. And

one cannot help but wonder if it was this psalm, these treasured words - not of course in English, but in Hebrew - that were on David's lips and in his heart when he himself entered the valley of the shadow of death and maybe, just maybe, began the tradition we experience again today.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Familiar words. And we will soon hear more familiar words, whose meaning I hope will comfort our hearts this day, both now for Paul, and someday for others we lose and for ourselves: "Deliver us from evil." Let me translate this more accurately from the original Greek, for the word 'evil' is not a noun, but an adjective. It means "deliver us from the evil one, that is, the devil and his kingdom of everlasting death. Paul has been delivered. That is why we have joy in the midst of our sorrow, why we know that our loss is his gain. For now he is with his father Tom in heaven, who helped him learn the 23rd Psalm so long ago, and together they and all those who have died in the faith are with Our Father who art in heaven, where they now dwell forever.

Let this great, good news be your comfort, dear fellow redeemed in Christ, today and all the days of your life. It will see you too through the valley of the shadow of death into eternal life. Amen.

+ Soli Deo Gloria