

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Michaeline and Melina, and all you who mourn on account of Mike's absence from us,  
You are loved by God.

It can be hard at times like these to think or believe this.

We can wonder, 'if God loved me, then why did He take Dad/my brother/my friend away from me?'  
And especially when the death was so sudden, without much warning, the shock is difficult to bear.

It was only a year and 4 months ago that we met here for Jennifer's memorial service.

It was hard at times for Mike to believe God's love for him too.

His loneliness and depression was pretty severe.

And yet, as he confessed to me, he did believe it still – that the Lord did love him.

Our text is a portion of Psalm 116, but really the whole psalm could have been chosen.

It is a psalm for God's people who are mourning the death of a loved one,

and it is a clear testimony of Mike's faith, as well as a great confession to be on our hearts & lips today.

*As follows in Jesus' name:*

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;            Yes, our God is merciful.

The Lord preserves the simple;            I was brought low, and He saved me.

Return to your rest, O my soul,            For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

For You have delivered my soul from death,            My eyes from tears, *And* my feet from falling.

I will walk before the Lord            In the land of the living. <sup>(NKJV)</sup>

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

It is not fair to summarize a man's whole life with just the last few years.

At age 61 ½ there was a lot of life lived.

A lot of good times. (Just summarizing a few high points.)

The birth of his two daughters, Michaeline and Melina.

His marriage to Jennifer.

Fishing, crabbing, hunting, golfing, helping friends, good food, and so on.

And he was happy to share his blessings with others,

whether of his presence with them, on hunting or fishing trips,

or sharing the bounty of his crabbing or smoking delicious meats.

(He might have shared a time or two with me.)

Even if you weren't able to be with him during each experience, he loved to share his stories, too.

And you will have time to tell those stories afterward when we gather with refreshments.

But life wasn't always good.

Fishing trips with trailer tires on fire rolling past your window make good stories to share afterwards,  
but aren't much fun while you are going through it.

A difficult divorce... and separation from the daily life of his daughters as they grew up.

These weren't his goals or dreams, he never wanted that, but they were part of his life.

And then the heartbreak of losing Jennifer,

being with her at all the appointments,

hearing the diagnoses and prognoses,

holding on with her through the hope of surgery and cancer treatments...  
and then hearing that the cancer had returned... and then that it was too aggressive...  
being there when she took her last breaths.

The earlier verses to Psalm 116 were very fitting for Michael:

**The pains [cords] of death surrounded me,  
And the pangs [distresses] of Sheol laid hold of [found] me;  
I found trouble and sorrow.**

**Then I called upon the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I implore You, deliver my soul!"** (Psalm 116:3-4 NKJV)

The **pains of death surrounded** Mike.

He and Jennifer were so close, doing practically everything together.

If Jennifer were working at the golf course, Mike was there.

If you asked Jennifer to help at the PLS auction, you knew you were getting two volunteers. ...

When Jennifer died, Mike felt the **trouble and sorrow** of deep loneliness.

It was nothing he wanted, nothing he tried to conjure up.

In fact, he was embarrassed about it, but he couldn't help it. It just overwhelmed him.

But it was a testament to how close those two were knit together,  
and the love and joy they gave each other.

And yet his sadness did not mean that he was without hope.

At Jennifer's memorial, he confessed, just as you did a few moments ago, the 15th verse of Psalm 116:

**Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints.** (Psalm 116:15 NKJV)

How could he say this? How can we say it at the funeral of those who die with the sign of faith?

Death always looks so final... It looks like it has gained the victory, that it has snatched us out of life.

And yet, Mike confessed, and now we confess also,

**Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;      Yes, our God is merciful.**

**The Lord preserves the simple;      I was brought low, and He saved me.**

The death of God's saints is precious because it ushers them out of this world of sin and sorrow,  
into His everlasting presence of joy, peace, and glory.

Because His saints are bound up in Jesus Christ through their baptism,  
which connects them to His death and resurrection,

we can confess in the words of the Psalm, **I will walk before the Lord In the land of the living.**

In other words, this death is not the end of the Christian, but the beginning of his life of glory.

Jennifer's death was a great trial for Michael, but by it/through it... his faith grew.

The wages of sin (that is, Death) was very real and very close.

And so he understood so much better the value of Jesus' death — in that he bore all our sins...

all Jennifer's sins... all his sins.

And his belief in **the resurrection of the dead** was no longer simply an abstract concept for him,  
it became a very real and desired truth.

He anticipated and looked forward to the time when he would join Jennifer again in Jesus' presence.

This was probably the greatest love that Jennifer had shown to Mike —

that she encouraged him back into the Church.

As we heard in the vita, after their wedding Mike took instruction and was confirmed.

He then began to receive the Lord's Supper at Parkland,  
and so **proclaimed the Lord's death till He comes.** <sup>1 Corinthians 11:26</sup>

The Lord's Supper became especially meaningful to Mike during Jennifer's illness and after her death.

It was as another couple verses from Psalm 116 say,

**What shall I render to the Lord For all His benefits toward me?**

**I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord.** (Psalm 116:12-13 NKJV)

Jennifer and Mike shared that **cup of salvation** numerous times during her illness,  
even up to the days before her death.

And afterward, Mike and I would visit, and when asked if he would like to receive the Lord's Supper,  
would always answer, "Yes."

He appreciated these visits, he would tell me. It calmed him and helped him.

It was as if he were confessing our text:

**Return to your rest, O my soul, For the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.**

...

Things were beginning to turn for Mike. I had visited him about a month-and-a-half before he died.

Things were looking a little brighter.

His interest in life was beginning to come back.

He had purchased a boat a number of months ago, and was working on it,  
planning to get back into a recreation he loved.

And yet, the Lord had other plans for him... plans, not of a slow recovery, but of an immediate one.

The Lord has delivered Michael's **eyes from tears and his feet from falling.**

Sorrow will never be a feeling that Michael will ever experience again.

Temptations to fall into despair or unbelief will never touch him.

**He has delivered [his] soul from [eternal] death,**

and he **walks before the Lord in the land of the living**, along with all the saints that have gone before.

But this psalm was not just for Michael. It is for us... for you.

We who remain here yet a little longer have a wonderful hymn (psalm) to learn, recite, and confess,  
just as the Church on earth has done for millennia.

It reminds you that even when **the pains of death surround [you]**, in Christ, the Lord loves you,

**For Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful.**

**...and He saved [you].**

**Precious, indeed, in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.** (NKJV)

For the Lord has saved us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God!

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*