

*As follows in Jesus' name:*

*"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (KJV)*

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

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In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

People Loved by God, especially you, Alisa, Terry, Steven, and (Tina - via livestream), and Jerry, Through 94 years, the Lord kept Anita in the faith.

Through the sudden death of her father, her heavenly Father remained with her to bless and keep her.

Through 3 marriages, He preserved and caused her faith to flourish.

Through 4 childbirths and rearing, He sustained and strengthened her.

And finally through death, He has released her from all her labors under this sun and granted her a crown of life.

Reflecting on all those years, it is easy to see what Jesus was talking about when He said to His disciples,

**"One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor.**

**Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."** John 4:37-38

While it has been my privilege to serve Anita these past 9 years, that was only a 10th of her life-time, and probably the easiest 10th, with a woman who's faith had been tested and tried under many different circumstances and for many years.

While others had labored with her during many of those trials.

We heard about her baptism at Trinity Lutheran Church in Olympia at the hand of Pr. Clarence Amling.

She reflected on those early years, obviously with a young child's remembrance, of a happy family life.

Her father Otto had been the captain of a tug boat in Olympia.

One day, he fell into the water and caught pneumonia, but it wasn't the pneumonia that killed him.

It was his allergic reaction to the sulfa drugs that he was given.

This changed Anita's world dramatically.

After Otto's funeral, conducted by Pr. Hillmer from Trinity in Olympia, WA.

The family moved up to Parkland to live with her Grandparents and great-aunt Tina,

so that her mother could work, and so became members of Parkland Lutheran Church.

At the age of 14, Anita was confirmed in the faith of her baptism through the instruction of my grandfather,

Pr. Walther Gullixson, and so he gave her the blessing of our text for today's meditation,

**"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (KJV)**

I wonder what she thought of that passage on that day.

Was she like many confirmands, remembering it for a little while, but then after a few years, even forgetting what it was?

She told stories of her young life.

There were fun times and fond memories, like:

going to Mt. Rainier in the winter for snow days with Pr. Gullixson and the youth society.

Going to the movies on Sunday afternoons with friends.

But there were also difficulties... even those that challenged her faith.

Expectations of young Christians were certainly different in those days.

Just 'going to the movies' was not an indication of a pious, godly life.  
With many of the older generations having gone through two difficult splits in the congregation that dwindled it down to about half each time,  
by Anita's account, there was a bitterness in some of the members.  
And not just at church, but even at home, her grandparents tended toward pietism, she told me, that expressed itself in rather legalistic ways.

...

At the age of 19, Anita married Alfred Becklund and soon children were on the way.

If you knew Anita, you know how much this meant to her.

She loved her family and gave herself full force into caring for her husband and children.

(If you have ever heard of those articles about home-making ideas from the 1940s and 50s,

they are reflected in Anita's practices: fresh-baked cookies when her kids come home from school, hair done and make-up on when her husband comes home, to make it a welcoming place to be.)

She cherished these gifts from God and had the ability to serve them in these ways.

But it distressed her that the family of God at Parkland was struggling with the bitterness she felt here.

Even having mostly grown up in the congregation, she did not feel welcome or loved all the time.

She was ready and hoping for a change,

so she started to look around area for other congregations.

It was at that time when Pr. Hans Theiste heard of her thoughts to leave.

As she recounted, as a true shepherd, instead of ignoring her and wishing her well in her search, he asked to visit with her on multiple occasions.

His visits helped her to recognize the truths that she had learned and memorized in confirmation.

He encouraged her to stay, not simply because Parkland wanted her membership,

but because Jesus was clearly preached as her Savior and forgiveness was clearly given each week, the very thing that she, and her family, and all people, truly need.

He helped her to see the importance of staying w/ the unchanging teaching of God's forgiveness in Christ, over and above the struggles that congregations & individuals have in living according to that Word.

(That is a story she recounted more than once to her various pastors ever since.)

You can see what an effect that had on her.

She not only stayed, but dug into the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the teaching of her salvation.

(I saw this reflected in her home library - even having a copy of Luther's Lectures on Galatians.)

She not only prioritized church attendance,

but trained her children to prepare for it on Saturday night with shoe polishing and laying out clothes.

She taught Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, and in doing so, was able to influence the younger generations of the congregation with the love of their Savior.

She helped and encouraged her children through Confirmation with Prs. Theiste and Hugo Handberg

Now, this is not to say she lived happily ever after after these visits.

Life brought with it many twists and turns;

the joys and burdens of being a mother don't end when children turn 18.

She was a supportive and devoted mother to her adult children, never ceasing to pray for them,

helping Alisa through her recovery from the car accident in MN,

helping Tina and Dale get through high school,

being with Terry through the difficulties of child-birth,  
making costumes and wedding dresses, and so much more.  
And then doing much of all that again with her grandchildren,  
encouraging them through Pr. Glenn Obenberger's Confirmation classes,  
as much as was in her power and ability.  
All this demonstrating the love and care she received first from her Lord and for other people.

But I should not neglect her devotion to her husbands, either.  
She was a care-giver... and cared for each of her 3 husbands, Alfred, Van, and Tony in life and in death.  
Each one had seen and heard her faithful testimony of their Savior  
and the forgiveness Jesus died to win for them. — You know that Anita made sure of that.

What you saw and heard in Anita is a faithful bride of Christ.  
In His mercy, **He gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her,  
having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word** (in her baptism). <sup>Ephesian 5:26</sup>  
Through trying and difficult times, He continued to sustain her  
through her faithful **reading, hearing, marking, learning and inwardly digesting His Word**  
as she regularly sat at His feet in Bible classes and as she prepared her lessons for SS and VBS.

...  
Anita was not perfect. She never claimed to be; in fact, the opposite.  
That's why she sat in that pew (pointing to the front pulpit side pew to the center aisle) — at least in the last decade of her life.  
She faithfully came to confess her sins to her Savior and to pray for His strength and wisdom.  
And she faithfully received His absolution through her many pastors  
(not to be left out among them are Prs. Alexander Ring, Peter Faugstad, Steven Sparley, and Matthew Lehne)  
who also labored with her in prayer and counseling through her struggles and sorrows and joys.

...  
But one other element of her time among us, that summarizes all of this so neatly,  
was her joy in caring for the congregation's archives (or "the library" as she and Lyla called it).  
These two ladies spent countless hours up in that little room reading through all the various files,  
sorting and organizing and filing them so that they would be easier for others to read.  
Through all the difficulties and joys during the years that Anita had in this congregation,  
from her youth to her old age, she knew that a family and its history are important —  
not because we are important, but because it teaches us about the love and care of our heavenly Father:  
that He forgives our sins through Christ,  
that He heals our wounds and binds us together in Christian love,  
and that He strengthens us for the trials and joys ahead, each week, each year, and each generation.

...  
So what now?  
Now, even while we mourn, we rejoice in the Lord's faithfulness to us and to His servant, Anita.  
And what a beautiful dress she now wears, not one stitched by her own hands,  
but the one given her by her Lord, **that He has presented her to Himself in splendor,  
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she is holy and without blemish.** <sup>Ephesian 5:27</sup>  
He has kept her faithful even unto death, and He has given to her her crown of life.

Thanks be to God!

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*