

“Be Still”

In the name of Jesus, our Savior of comfort, power and peace, dear loved ones of Gus Warnest:

What is it about a man like Gustav Walter Warnest that makes everyone glad to call him “Gus”? What makes everyone in his neighborhood or congregation glad when he stops by to talk? Why do the nurses think he’s such a nice man whether he’s the patient, or whether he’s coming on his daily visits to see his sweetheart of nearly seven decades? Why would one of his doctors say, “He made me a better doctor”? Why would his minister gladly admit, “I’m a better pastor from serving him”?

At the age of nine-two, Gus drove himself to early Bible Class again on Sunday, October 26. I will miss having him sit up close where he can hear and find his way in the *Concordia Lutheran Confessions*. Such a man could easily say as was found in his last daily devotion, “I don’t know everything. But I know what I need to know.” Such a man made everyone better for knowing not so much him, but the God who loved him and all of us too. The very Word of God that made Gus Warnest what he is, is the Word that comforts us today from the last Psalm I read to him on the Friday of his heart attack, Psalm 46. He had that twinkle in his eye to hear these familiar words again. [Read Psalm 46.]

Afterwards Gus’ comment was this, “My doctor says I have a very strong heart. He will be surprised I’m in for heart problems. But, Pastor, I figure either way I win. Yes, brother Gus. You win. For you have learned the meaning of this word from God.

“Be still, and know that I am God.” ***“Be still”*** is both a warning to the enemies of God as well as comfort to all who trust in Him. “Drop your weapons and stop your stubborn rebellion, all you who want to deny that the LORD Jehovah, or Yahweh, the God of the Bible created all things by His powerful Word. It is so clearly and accurately reported in the only eye-witness account of Genesis 1,2. Gus could see God’s creation all over the Holy Scriptures of the Bible. And if a pastor dared to question or soften that message from the very first verse of the Bible, Gus was not afraid to set him straight. To Gus Warnest, ***“Be still,”*** did not mean “be quiet” when it was time to speak up for the LORD. It was just that Gus could correct in a way that made you glad he cared.

Yes, he cared about the Creator God who also promised in the beginning to send His one and only begotten Son as the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent’s head. Gus was convinced that God kept that awesome promise when Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again from the dead. This is the reason everyone who trusts in the God who created and redeemed Gus Warnest can also ***“Be Still.”*** For our Lord Jesus Christ does not want anyone to be lost in the darkness on the outside of God’s love. He says to all of us again today, ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*** (Matthew 11:28ff NIV)

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” God’s powerful help and protection were always on Gus’ mind. He especially liked to tell how God took care of him so many years ago. You know, he was born in the middle of “The War to End all Wars.” A few years later he served in the Second World War. Stationed in North Africa, as his buddies were being shipped off for the Normandy Invasion of Europe, Gus was assigned to be a clerk. God kept out of harm’s way even in the bombing of the base where he was stationed. God protected him from danger and destroyed the fascists bent on ending Christianity in the world. God brought Gus home to his God-fearing wife Charlotte, so that they could raise a family and be together for another half century, exalting God and praising Him with their lips and lives.

One of those long days in the hospital this past summer Charlotte whispered to me, “You know why I’m here, don’t you?” “Yes, you fell again.” “That’s right,” she said seeming so happy to tell me this. “I thought if I fell once for Gus that would be enough.” Knowing such a couple faithful in our faithful God makes all of us better husbands and wives.

Why was it that Gus never had a bad word to say about anyone? Why can his children look back on firm but loving discipline and his dear Charlotte on a life of faithful love and kindness? Why could people who felt on the outside always know that Gus would accept them as they are and welcome them as a friend close to his heart?

The answer is profoundly simple – simple enough for a child to understand, profound enough to defy the scholars and intellectuals of any age. Gus knew by experience the powerful love of God in Christ Jesus. Not a day went by that Gus was not repenting to God for his sins in thought, word and deed, because like all the rest of us sons and daughters of Adam, Gus too inherited a sinful nature from his parents that made it impossible to do anything good enough to please the holy and perfect God.

But God-fearing parents took God at His Word and brought their little son to the Word-powered water of Baptism. There God, according to His promise, washed away all Gus’ sins and adopted him into God’s family of faith. The rest of Gus’ eternal life on earth and as it continues forever in the glory of heaven is a celebration of God’s grace in the powerful work of God the Holy Spirit with His chosen tools of Word and sacrament. What you and I were really seeing in Gus is the face of Jesus Christ who came to live there in full and free forgiveness. Truly we have a beautiful Savior.

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

You recognize the “Battle Hymn of the Reformation,” “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” in which Martin Luther praised God for His protection. The two most powerful men in the world, the Pope and the Emperor, wanted Luther dead. But God kept them busy elsewhere, while He established the Good News once again in Germany. Luther’s hymn passes on to us the encouragement to keep fighting the LORD’s battles until all the nations have to admit there is one Triune God in the judgment of the Last Day.

God Almighty chose to end the war between us rebellious sinners by suffering for our sins on the cross and rising again to declare us all, “Not guilty!” for Jesus’ sake. ***“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.”*** God wrote out a check to each of us and signed it with the blood of Christ. He offers this free payment for heaven to one and all in the Gospel. God does not want anyone left outside, but that all should come close to Him in repentant faith to nestle in His warm and wonderful forgiveness. ***“And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:19-21 NIV)

All the striving and struggling of this life are done for our brother, husband, father and friend, Gus Warnest. At last he can truly ***“Be Still”*** in the fullness of God’s glory in heaven. No one can make waves up there because God’s throne is surrounded by ***“a sea of glass, clear as crystal.”*** (Revelation 4:6) Not a ripple of discord, disease or distress can stir the stillness of absolute peace and boundless happiness in the arms of God close to His loving heart.

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

May God bring us all to that unending joy with Jesus our Savior – in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.