

“I AM the Resurrection and the Life”

In the name of Jesus, our risen and living Savior, dear loved ones of Charlotte, all loved by God:

When a young person dies, people naturally ask, “Why so soon?” When an elderly widow dies, we can’t help asking, “Why so long?” Charlotte wanted to go home to heaven long ago. Charlotte has been asking ever since her dear Gus passed away five years ago in November, “Why so long? Why doesn’t the Lord take me?” That’s what she was praying for, and now that blessing is hers.

Another question came up in our meeting which I find amusing. Hospice caregivers kept asking, “Where does Charlotte get that spunk?” If we could have known Charlotte as a little girl, I’ll bet she would have been lively then too. Just for fun, I asked Karon and Marian and Wayne, “Which of you got your mother’s spunk?” You all just looked at each other. This is another case where kids inherited from their parents some wonderful blessings which may not be clear to us even when we grow into parents and grandparents ourselves. But there is a reason for Charlotte’s spunk, that spark of life that animated her. It is something your father Gus had too, beneath his calmness. This family legacy our gracious God wants all of us to enjoy and to pass on to the next generation as we remember Charlotte and her best Friend.

Many of us are blessed to be married to our soul mate. Yet none of us can say, “I died and rose for you.” None of us can claim to be the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for the sheep. More than their love for each other, your dear Mom and Dad knew Jesus as their best and truest Friend. Jesus says, ***“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” “They will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”*** (John 10:27,5) I told you my great lesson with your Mom in this. On a visit a few weeks ago she did not recognize me at first. Kept telling me, in her spunky way, to go get her pastor – and she was thirsty. When I came back with a nurse’s aid and water, then she knew me. But what she really wanted was Lord’s Supper, her best Friend’s miraculous gift of forgiveness in His body and blood – in, with, under the bread and wine.

That’s why Charlotte would not give up on God when days got long and lonely, when the last question of her life seemed to go unanswered. She was saying like the holy writer in the Book of Psalms: ***“How long, O LORD, how long? Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love.”*** (Psalm 6:3f NIV84) God’s ***“unfailing love”*** in Christ still sustains us when questions go unanswered.

One of your Mom’s favorite Bible passages is nestled in the question of two grieving sisters who were asking the Lord, “Why so long?” Mary and Martha were good friends of Jesus. When their brother Lazarus got sick, they sent word across the Jordan River to Perea: ***“Lord, the one you love is sick.” Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.*** Strange, isn’t it? When He told His disciples they should go and wake Lazarus, you can see why they’d say, “If he’s sleeping, he’ll get better.” ***So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”*** Who can blame Martha and Mary for asking Jesus, “Why so long?”

Here’s part of the family legacy: They kept asking Jesus. Charlotte asked Jesus, “How long?” We don’t go somewhere else for answers. And when we keep coming back to God, we honor Him with patient endurance just as He has honored us with His patience all these years. We’re never as patient as we ought to be because we still have the sinful nature which we inherited from our parents. But God kindly forgives those sins too for Jesus’ sake and lovingly teaches us about life through death.

Jesus taught Martha God's infinite love and awesome power. ***"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."*** She's still confessing her faith. ***Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."*** ***Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."*** She was right.

Earlier in John 5, Jesus had spoken about the second resurrection when everyone will rise. ***"A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."*** (5:28f NIV84) Jesus is pointing to their good works or lack of good works as evidence of faith or the lack of faith. The dear Holy Spirit explained when He inspired Paul to write: ***"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*** (Ephesians 2:8–10 NIV84) Jesus does not say good works save anyone. Also in John 5, our Lord said: ***"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."*** (John 5:24 NIV84) In Revelation, the Holy Spirit inspired John to write, ***"Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them...."*** (Revelation 20:6 NIV84) Likewise Paul in his letter to Titus: ***"[God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."*** (Titus 3:5–7 NIV84)

The beauty of your family legacy is that you know all this and still believe in Jesus to this day. When your parents brought you to God the Holy Spirit, He gave you His ***"born again washing"*** in Baptism. Jesus took you by the hand and led you as He led your parents to ***"cross over from death to life."*** And in that new life which you enjoy by faith in your best and truest Friend, you do good works out of thankfulness and gratitude. We love to praise God not only with our lips but with our lives!

You never had to worry about your parents like one young woman I met in China a few years ago. Sarah was so happy to know Jesus as her Savior. She wore bright pink tennis shoes and almost danced down the street when she walked. But Sarah was worried about her Mom and Dad who had not yet confessed Christ as their Savior. In a Bible Class with them she made sure to ask the Pastor, "What happens to someone who dies without believing in Jesus?" He answered as Jesus does, ***"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** (Mark 16:16 NIV84) A few weeks ago I saw some pictures of Sarah and her parents after their Baptism. God got through. Now she's not the only one beaming with joy in the forgiving love of God in Christ.

God created all people to be His family. His heart was ripped apart when Adam and Eve rebelled. God never wanted sin and death to come into His world. But God is so kind and gentle He will not force Himself on anyone. Instead God promised a Savior who would come and take our guilt on Himself. God kept repeating that promise in greater detail for centuries. Finally, God sent His Son Jesus to be born of the virgin Mary – true God and yet true man. Our dear brother died and lives again for us all.

Jesus comforted Lazarus' sister Martha, His dear Charlotte and us: ***"I AM the Resurrection and the Life."*** He does not say, "I bring the resurrection," the way our New Life Women of Faith brought lunch for us today. Jesus first says, ***"I AM...."*** At least twenty-three times in John's Gospel account Jesus makes this claim to be the eternal God, the great Jehovah, Yahweh, the God of free and faithful grace, the Savior God. ***"I AM the Resurrection"*** – because Christ Jesus will raise everyone from the dead and give to all who trusted in His righteousness the crown of everlasting life. Faith shows in righteous lives with Him who says, ***"I AM...the life."*** He asked Martha and us, ***"Do you believe this?"*** I pray all of us will answer: ***"Yes, Lord....I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."*** This is the saving faith, the spark of life in your Mom and Dad which now lives in you. Spark or spunk, we are energized to live with God forever. What a Friend we have in Jesus! Amen.