

Lessons from a Life Well Lived

- ✦ a teacher at heart
- ✦ God's child for eternity

In the Name of Jesus, the Lord of our life, our comfort in death, our hope for eternity, dear loved ones, especially you dear Ralph, brother of Ruth and brother of us all:

How do you begin to sum up **a Life Well Lived**? Personally, I'm grateful to friends and loved ones of Ruth Odegard who gathered and displayed all the pictures and mementos for her Memorial Service. But in all honesty, knowing Ruth, she would be somewhat embarrassed by all the attention. Even when she was really hurting, as much as she struggled with pain and frustration from her stroke just before Holy Week in 2016, Ruth tried not to focus on herself. But one thing that would deeply please Ruth is to see all of you here. And even better if you could continue to be blessed by this memorial service in days to come. It would please Ruth to no end if we could all learn **Lessons from a Life Well Lived**. But she would question whether that was her life. You know, Ruth always was...

✦ a teacher at heart

In Ruth's collection is a student paper, describing Miss Odegard in the eyes of an elementary school girl. Such honesty about her teacher admitting didn't really want to take care of a baby brother, then being so happy when Ralph was born. All of us who know Ruth, know her deep care and concern for Ralph. Isn't that a **Lesson** to learn **from a Life Well Lived**? Teachers for students...students for teachers...brothers and sisters in families – not just biological, but so much more.

Another **Lesson** is that Ruth wanted no eulogy. Many members have made this request over the years. There's a deep desire that someone else get all the glory for **a Life Well Lived**.

That's why Psalm 90 is so fitting for Ruth's Memorial Service. You'd have to wonder why if all you hear are the first eleven verses. The Evangelical Heritage Version¹ conveys even harsher judgment from the original Hebrew expressions. Contrast *God Is Eternal* with *Man Is Mortal*:

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. ²Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the world, from eternity to eternity you are God. ³You grind people to dust, and you say, "Return, children of Adam." ⁴For a thousand years in your sight are like a day, like yesterday that has gone by, or like a watch in the night. ⁵You sweep them away like a flood. They are like sleep in the morning, like grass which changes quickly. ⁶In the morning it sprouts and grows. By evening it is cut down, and it withers. ⁷Surely, we are consumed by your anger, and by your wrath we are terrified. ⁸You have laid out our guilty deeds in front of you. Our hidden sins are revealed in the light of your face. ⁹For all our days pass away under your fury. We finish our years like a sigh. ¹⁰The days of our lives add up to seventy years, or eighty years if we are strong. Yet the best of them are trouble and sorrow, for they disappear quickly, and we fly away. ¹¹Who can understand the power of your anger? But your fury is consistent with the fear that is owed to you.

Who could listen to that if you didn't know what was coming? It's like the terrible diagnosis from your doctor which you never wanted to hear, but the disease is treatable. Ruth's friends, Ruth Strubel and Amber Hanson, did not want to find Ruth on the floor suffering from a stroke. But the police were finally

¹ Wartburg Project. Holy Bible: Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV): New Testament and Psalms. NPH (800-662-6022)

convinced to enter and help was given as quickly as possible. Spiritual aid from God's Word and sacrament quickly followed. Like a skillful surgeon, God only cuts in order to heal.

3500 years ago God's inspired writer was 40, committed murder and fled. At age 80, the LORD appeared to him in a burning bush. Tell the superpower Pharaoh of Egypt, "Let my people go!" After the Exodus, Moses endured Israelite rebellion 40 years, age 80-120? He led God's chosen nation all the way to the Promised Land, but then God refused to let Moses enter. Why? Numbers 20 begins with the death of his sister, Miriam. Then Israel quarreled with Moses and high priest brother Aaron. We understand why Moses got so angry after all that. But when Moses and Aaron failed to glorify God, the LORD made an example of them: **"Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."** (Numbers 20:12 NIV84)

Not even Moses could get into heaven by good works. He had to confess guilt before God along with all of us. The Lord's Apostle Paul wrote to the Galatians, referring to the Law of Moses: **"All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'" But the teacher would not let the student go away depressed and condemned. Only a few verses later, the Lord says through Paul: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" (Galatians 3:10,13 NIV84) God's lessons come hard, but end so sweetly. Ruth is still...**

✠ God's child for eternity

"Teach us to number our days in such a way, that we bring a heart of wisdom." (EHV)

Last Sunday's Gospel lesson brings **"a heart of wisdom."** A woman desperately needed Jesus to heal her daughter of demon possession. Jesus was harsh: **"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel," The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!"...He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour."** (Matthew 15:21-28 NIV84) Not works, faith!

That's how our sister Ruth Odegard came to God, in humility and pleading for mercy. Like Moses, the Canaanite woman, and all who seek God's grace, we recognized that our lives have not been lived as well as God demands. That would require perfect love and trust in God at all times and in every way. The perfect holiness God demands would mean zero selfishness ever, always thinking of others more than ourselves. Only one man ever delivered the perfect holiness God demands. **"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."** (John 3:16 EHV) God's undeserved love in Christ hears the sweet ending prayer of Psalm 90:

"Turn, O LORD! How long! Change your mind toward your servants. ¹⁴Satisfy us in the morning with your mercy, so that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. ¹⁵Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. ¹⁶Let your deeds be seen by your servants and your majesty by their children. ¹⁷May the kindness of the Lord our God rest upon us. Establish the work of our hands for us. Yes, establish the work of our hands." (EHV)

Because Jesus lived a perfect life, Ruth is now completely satisfied with God's **mercy**, singing in unlimited gladness for the eternal day with God. In the arms of Jesus her Savior, Ruth is now **glad**. For how long? Here it says, **"For as many days as you have afflicted us."** But that would be too short for God. Our entire life on earth is like a drop of water in the sea of eternity. God goes way beyond the days of our affliction here so that we can sing even through our tears, "When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we'd first begun." (379:4) Ruth brightened up whenever the children sang. She wanted God's majestic love and glorious deeds of salvation seen by Sunday School children all her life. Ruth's legacy lives on as you and I put our total trust in God's forgiving grace. **"May the kindness of the Lord our God rest upon us."** Amen.

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