

## Celebrate God's Gift of Grace

✠ to us (vv.8,9)

✠ through us (v.10)

In the name of Jesus, dear loved ones of Don Childs, especially you, dear Alberta and Don, Jr.:

Our Christian brother was constantly preparing for two things in his life: 1) To take Holy Communion while trusting only in Jesus' righteousness; 2) To go home to heaven with Jesus. Over the years he graced my file with many notes like these: "Dear Pastor Cordes, I'm trusting solely (soully) in the merits of Jesus Christ for my salvation. P.S. I'm ready for whatever the Lord has planned for me. I want to go home." (7/9/2005) "Dear Pastor Cordes, I recently attended a funeral of a Korean Veteran. He was called a hero to family and friends. This [referring to himself] Korean Veteran is not a hero! I'd like to be remembered as a sinner, Christian man, who loved his Lord. A man who knew he was redeemed by the grace of almighty God through faith in Christ Jesus, my Lord and Savior. In His Holy Name, Don." (8/27/2005) "Dear Pastor Cordes, My friends are sick and dying. When the Lord calls me home, please use the following text at my funeral. Thanks, Don." (11/11/2007)

Over the years Don gave me at least three Bible texts for his funeral sermon. They are included as Scripture Lessons today. We will focus on the first one he requested "In the one true God," May 1994. Along with the fact that Don did not consider himself a hero, you'll see why he wanted no eulogies about himself. Don often echoed the Lord's Apostle Paul: "***May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.***" (Galatians 6:14 NIV84) Don wanted us today to **Celebrate God's Gift of Grace**. Yes, God's amazing grace today...

✠ to us (vv.8,9)

In his teen years Don says he decided he "no longer needed God and walked away from His church." By age 19, Don was in Korea as what he described to me as a macho young soldier. He refused to join his fellow GI's in Christian worship. In those days that meant "KP duty." Don was up to his elbows in potato peels when the Chaplain came through offering a New Testament and Psalms. "I don't need that!" 19-year-old Don retorted. "When you get up to the front, soldier, you'll need this," answered the equally stubborn Chaplain as he shoved the little book into Don's pocket.

Artillery exploding over your head has a way of shattering the pride of any human heart. God purposely shattered Don's self-made peace in Korea. Trembling, he opened the little book of God's Word and comfort, God's love letter to the lost. Don's eyes fell on these words: "***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.***" The enemy missed Don with explosive shells. God opened up his heart and soul with Psalm 23. He cried from the inside out: "God if you get me out of this hell, I will find out who you are."

"By the grace of God my life was spared." "***Indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.***" (EHV<sup>1</sup>) But God was not finished just saving Don physically in Korea. God the Holy Spirit kept working to save Don's soul back in America too. Many GI's swore to God like Don. Many got back home and forgot. But Don was blessed with some stubbornly loving Christian friends who were also personally amazed by God's grace to them. They invited Don to Pastor Drews' Adult Information Class. "It was there through a study of God's Word, and by the power of God, the Holy Spirit, that I repented of my sins

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<sup>1</sup> EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version*. The Wartburg Project, © 2019. (NPH: 800-662-6022; Amazon / Kindle)

and received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior from sin and Lord of my life. Only through faith in Christ will one find peace, joy, and eternal life. Share the Good News with some lost soul today. A grateful Christian – To the glory of God alone.”

Some folks stubbornly criticize God for all the suffering in the world. Maybe you too can relate to Don’s stubborn unbelief in his early years. Maybe you are a stubborn skeptic like me. In one way or another we all prove God’s Holy Spirit true through Isaiah in our first Lesson: **“We all have gone astray like sheep. Each of us has turned to his own way, but the LORD has charged all our guilt to him.”**

Don found comfort in those words from Psalm 23, **“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”** One shepherd explained that the **staff** is the long walking stick with the hook for lifting little lambs out of tight crevices. But the **rod** is for disciplining stubborn sheep. A skillful shepherd can send his **rod** whistling through the air to stop the fighting and wandering. And one shepherd even broke the leg of a sheep who kept wandering away because that sheep was safer limping at his shepherd’s side.

Don’s Good Shepherd continued by grace alone to preserve and strengthen Don’s faith. He used Don’s dreaded flashbacks of PTSD to keep Don limping at his Shepherd’s side. We all try to lean on our own good works if not for salvation, at least for making some contribution to our faith as a decision or better character or whatever. God uses whistling artillery and other dreadful disciplines on those He loves to bring us and keep us near to Him. Don’s note on an article by a retired judge, another Korean War Veteran, says it so well, “Dear Pastor Mark, The above is nothing compared to what Jesus went through. But for sinners like me, it was hell. In Christ, Don Childs, Sr.” When God saves us by grace alone and gives us the gift of faith to believe it, He still wants us to remember what He saved us from – an eternity of conscious, unending torment. That’s why it cost the blood of God’s own Son. Jesus volunteered as the only Savior who could wash us clean from all guilt. Don and countless souls have already passed **“through the valley of the shadow of death”** and **“are coming out of the great tribulation”** (Revelation 7:13 EHV). With them we **Celebrate God’s Gift of Grace – to us** and, praise God, also...

### ✠ **through us (v.10)**

For many years Don’s fellow members at South Shore Trinity were blessed by God’s grace through him as a Sunday School teacher, visiting Elder, most any position that would bring God’s loving kindness and tender mercy to more people. Don wanted most of all to keep hearing God’s holy Word in all its truth and purity. That first love never left him. Christ in grace was shining through him. If you trust in Jesus as your personal Savior, then you know this grace too: **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance so that we would walk in them.”** You learn more and more that **“we walk by faith, not by sight.”** (2 Corinthians 5:7)

One of our cherished family memories comes to mind. It was the blazing hot summer of 1995. I was headed to summer school and thinking about my wife Cindy, our little ones and her day care without air conditioning. I had just decided to cover the cost myself in the church’s parsonage when Don called me. “Pastor, I’ve been thinking about Cindy and the children in the heat without air conditioning. I want you to get it installed, and if the church won’t pay for it, I will.” Later the congregation did cover the cost of what they considered a repair. But **God’s Gift of Grace** was shining **through** Don who was always thinking of others, especially pastors who shared with him God’s Word of grace. Any summer since, when our AC goes on, we say, “Thank God for Don Childs.” **Grace – through us!**

The last few times we saw him on this side of glory **God’s Gift of Grace** was shining **through**. His last Monday evening on earth I didn’t know what to expect after Alberta and Don, Jr., had ministered to him all day with God’s Word and prayer. Walking into his room, I saw Don turn and say very clearly: “Hi, Pastor!” Confusion set in, but peace returned after an hour of hearing Penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) and Psalms of Ascent (120-134). Don had witnessed long ago to a fellow security worker named Alberta. God gave Don and Alberta 22 years together as husband and wife. How sweet his last words as she laid her head on his chest, “I love you, Alberta.” We love you too, Don. We **Celebrate God’s Gift of Grace – to us**, and **through us** – all the more because God gave you to us. Gracious God in Christ alone, thank you for this “grateful Christian.” Let us live “To the glory of God alone.” Amen.

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