

Forever Alive in Christ

In the Name of Jesus your best and truest Friend, dear loved ones of Alberta Childs:

Surely God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. So much of what God does we cannot see because for us, all is physical – a short, diminishing view in front, and behind us many memories we ought to forget. So the Lord of love and life reveals wonders such as when Jesus said: ***“Amen, Amen, I tell you: Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He is not going to come into judgment but has crossed over from death to life.”*** (John 5:24 EHV¹)

Our loved one, Alberta Elaine Childs, first heard the Word of God connected to the water of Baptism on February 23, 1930. Just two weeks old, she received what God reveals to be the miraculous, born-again salvation from Christ. The Lord’s Apostle Paul writes: ***“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, he saved us—not by righteous works that we did ourselves, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs in keeping with the hope of eternal life.”*** (Titus 3:4–7) ***Eternal life*** Jesus says begins as soon as you believe in God the Father who sent Jesus.

In such amazing grace, God put His saving Name on Alberta, adopting her into His own family of faith, and watching over her life, physically and spiritually. She met a co-worker in security at the Saint Paul Companies who remembered his own fear in unbelief. That’s why Don Childs, Sr., was always eager to share the peace that came from Jesus when he ***crossed over from death to life*** by faith.

It was through that work connection that I finally got to meet Alberta. Don’s first wife Sharon had passed away from cancer. Like other men, he asked his pastor if it was okay to date. I reminded him that marriage is just for this life, so, yes, with God’s blessing. Later Don and Alberta planned their wedding for June, but Don’s lease was running out. They wanted to do things God’s way with God’s blessing, without moving in together until after they were married. “Pastor, what do we do?” “It takes about two weeks to get a marriage license. That would be Ash Wednesday. Let’s marry you right after church. Then you can have our family celebration as planned in June.” Alberta’s question was sweet and innocent: “Pastor, you would do that?” Sure! God bless you!

That was the first of many times she expressed surprise for Christ-like love. Grace was always so amazing to Alberta. “Pastor, I used to come to church because I had to – or else. Now I come because I want to.” Church and Bible Class as often and as long as she was able. Little things most wouldn’t notice like sitting in back, Don up front, to record on cassette without the “click” in the middle of the sermon, flipping the tape midway. Digital recordings preserve her work in our Sermon Archive, God’s peace.

We have a beautiful Savior. And when Christ comes to live in someone’s heart by faith, His beauty keeps shining through. He gave Alberta such a kind heart, making her our congregation’s grandma, always sewing baby blankets, giving gifts to our children too. Sending personal cards and for New Life Women of Faith to congregation members. “Stamping up” was her fun for others.

Recently, some of the men were saying how Alberta had become “a pillar of the congregation.” Her faith had grown so strong in God’s promise that she could plan her funeral too, as Don, Sr., did before. She loved the Scriptures from Kathy Sowder’s funeral, and requested them for today. Alberta’s hymn choices too. Heaven brings a sweeter rest. Heaven is our home – secure and certain in Christ.

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

One of her loveable, Christ-like qualities was what I like to call, keeping it real. She could humble you and encourage you in one of those quick, but always kind come-backs. After one sermon especially meaningful for her, she told me, “Don’t you ever retire.” “Alberta, someday I won’t be able to see, you know.” “But Pastor, you can still preach when you’re blind, you know!”

Another gem was shared on Caring Bridge by Kathleen Dittel. “She surely will be missed. When she first found out that she had cancer, she told me that she was prepared to go and I said that I wasn’t prepared to lose such a dear friend, and she said, ‘you know we can’t leave here alive.’ ”

True, physically, but our dear Savior Jesus gives us another perspective, revealing the mystery of eternal life. Today’s Gospel tells how Mary and Martha’s brother Lazarus was four-days dead when Jesus finally arrived. He had purposely waited as He told His disciples: **“This sickness is not going to result in death, but it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”** (11:4)

Surely God’s glory shines so brightly in Jesus’ classic promise to Martha and us: **“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even if he dies. And whoever lives and believes in me will never perish. Do you believe this?”** “Yes, Lord,” she told him. **“I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”** (John 11:25–27)

Asleep in Jesus, but still alive with God in heaven. Awaiting the resurrection to life. The same power of God that created these bodies, will raise one and all. God promised through Daniel centuries before Christ: **“Many who are sleeping in the dusty ground will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame, to everlasting contempt. Those who have insight will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who bring many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever.”** (Daniel 12:2f)

Right after Jesus talked about crossing over **“from death to life,”** He added: **“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out. Those who have done good will rise to live, but those who have practiced evil will rise to be condemned.”** (John 5:28f) The Bible says that faith alone saves by grace, but faith is never alone. On Judgment Day, Jesus will point to good works as evidence of faith. **“Without faith it is impossible to please God.”** (Hebrews 11:6) What joy in Christians like Alberta – guilt gone, gratitude for Jesus thriving.

As she kept requesting and receiving Christ’s body and blood in His Holy Sacrament, Alberta kept saying how ready she was to go home to heaven. Thank God for the hospice workers so lovingly caring for our loved one. **Forever Alive in Christ,** Alberta went home to Jesus on October 7th.

Another dear soul, Chris Huber, told me shortly before His final journey, “Pastor, it’s not the dying that scares me. I’m ready. But the process of dying, that’s hard.” We are so much like travelers on the wild ocean this time of year, so close to the harbor, but raging seas hide rocks and shoals beneath. A childhood classmate of mine was shipwrecked on some rocks like that. But remember the famous hymn: *When at last I near the shore And the fearful breakers roar Twixt me and the peaceful rest, Then while leaning on Thy breast, May I hear Thee say to me, “Fear not! I will pilot thee.”* (CW 433)

Nothing sums up Alberta’s life in the Lord like the faith of the babies of whom Jesus says, **“These little ones who believe in me.”** (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42) **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen I tell you: Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”** (Luke 18:16f)

Can you think of a sweeter way to remember Alberta than sitting in back to help the moms and hold the babies like little Joy and James. Who was blessed more, their Mom Abigail, or Alberta? And that Caring Bridge picture of Abigail’s Josiah. Receive the kingdom of God with childlike faith, yes, but also take Christ to your heart as sweetly as you would hold a baby. There’s baby Josiah and Alberta, looking into each other’s eyes. There they are sleeping so peacefully. So peacefully **Forever Alive in Christ.** Nothing would please Alberta more than for each of you to have God’s peace today. Like a little child, hold your Savior close to your heart. Amen.