

Love the Freedom!

In the name of Jesus, the Victor over sin, death and hell, dearly redeemed believers:

Wouldn't you agree that people are really apprehensive these days? One overused word in the media is *unprecedented*. As if no supreme court ever had leaks or went astray! As if no rulers ever came out against Christians and concerned citizens! As if there were no violence in society ever before, or betrayal by family members of each other! It's "unprecedented"! Really?

Our culture is suffering from gross ignorance about history. Read Matthew 24 or Mark 13 in the Bible, and you can't help noticing that all of this was predicted by Jesus – along with His own suffering and death on the cross. He had every opportunity to escape execution. His disciples urged Him to do so. Yet He pressed on to the cross where He prayed as He hung between the earth and sky, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!**" (Luke 23:34) And God the Father shouted His acceptance of Jesus' sacrifice by raising Him from the dead. **He was handed over to death because of our trespasses and was raised to life because of our justification.** (Romans 4:25 EHV¹)

Especially if you served in the military as Bob and Helen did, you know that history repeats itself. If you **Love the Freedom!** of coming and going from worship according to your own conscience, you know that freedom isn't free. And those most in danger of losing it are the ones who take it for granted or deny the reality of enemies at home and abroad.

And yet there is a far worse kind of slavery that most Americans these days increasingly just don't want to think about. The slavery to guilt and fear cannot be overcome by denying death. What force, no matter how sincere or right, could see the enemy coming, hide behind a rock and cover their eyes and ears – then expect to stay free? These physical wars and rumors of wars cannot compare with the cosmic spiritual battle for our eternal souls. To win this fight, to conquer in this war, took none other than the Christ of God, so long foretold, so faithfully given. He could suffer the worst of our enemies of sin, death and hell, conquer our guilt, then cry out in victory: "**It is finished!**"

Do you believe Jesus who died for you, for me, for all? Or do you believe the world of religious critics and self-wrought authorities who keep saying, "Yeh, but...!" They always want to add something else. Our own sinful heart wants to at least take some credit for a decision for Christ. But any of me that's added to my salvation is as cheap as sanding milk paint into the hood of a brand new luxury car. You can work as hard as you want, but you cannot improve on God's salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Still today our risen Savior cries out to you and me, as He did again and again to Bob and Helen: "**Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**" (Matthew 11:28) That was the beautiful simplicity of their faith. They attended Divinity Lutheran Church in Saint Paul for fifty years, after helping found the congregation as charter members. When housing and health brought them to Shoreview, they still wanted to keep coming to Jesus for *rest* here at New Life. And when they were not longer able to come themselves to worship, God gave loving brothers and sisters to bring our Savior's *rest* and *peace* to them. Their weary burdens were constantly relieved by Word and sacrament.

At the Oshkosh Fly-in with my son Joel back in the day, spectators were "Oohing" and "Ah-ing" at U.S. military might. Helen would have enjoyed the Air Force presence for which I'm so grateful to **Love the Freedom!** to proclaim Christ-crucified and risen. But as a student of history, I couldn't help wondering that day, "What happens if all this power falls into the wrong hands to be used against us?"

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

So often I need to pull people away from obsessions with politics and the physical world. To focus on Christ is the need for every soul to find eternal rest and peace with God. But it was a hallmark of faith for Bob and Helen that as much as they loved their country and were rightfully proud of their service, they would never dwell on that. They sunk their hearts into their Master's treasure of grace in Word and sacrament. They simply wanted Jesus. And Jesus simply, constantly, faithfully came to them.

His promise? ***“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*** (Revelation 2:10 EHV) They faithfully put their hope and confidence not in their own faith, but in God's faithfulness to them. Just as Job cried out from the depths of despair in the middle of his Bible book, they always confessed as well: ***“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; ²⁷I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”*** (Job 19:25-27)

They were eager to guard and treasure Christ's commands, loving Him who loved us first. Jesus promised the ***Counselor***, the dear Holy Spirit. As family passed, life became more and more the two of them, grown children visiting, caregivers, congregational members and pastors. Yet it was always God the Holy Spirit who kept loneliness away. ***“The one who loves me will be loved by my Father.” “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”*** He's just that *into* us, even now ascended and ruling all things for the good of His Church from God's right hand in heaven.

It was while trying to visit Bob and Helen in the early months of 2020, that I first encountered COVID quarantine. New Life volunteers were able to drop off DVDs of our worship services for which they often expressed their appreciation. Opportunities to visit would come and go as they still hungered and thirsted for righteous in our Savior's Holy Supper.

Only our gracious God can know the end of life's journey, who will pass from grace to glory first. Helen was frustrated trying string her thoughts together. Bob was more quiet than ever. Yet appreciation for Jesus and His grace was shining in their eyes. Thankfully, Pastor Gawrisch was in town to visit shortly before God called Helen home on January 27th. She departed in peace with our Savior's blessing.

As soon as I returned a few days later, I was privileged to visit Bob who was quite confused by then – or so it seemed. Maybe he recognized me after a while, but he kept pointing as if he wanted to go out. So I wheeled him the length of the hall and back to his room, but he insisted non-verbally to go toward the door leaving the memory unit. One of the staff explained to me that was where they took Helen out. As he tried to pull himself along by the handrail on the wall, I had to kneel down next to him and block the wheel, putting my arm gently around his shoulders as I would my own dad if I could. You know that they were not usually the hugging type. But Bob really needed a firm, gentle squeeze that day. I assured him Jesus is always with us to give peace. He got a little teary-eyed as I told him Helen is home in heaven with Jesus. We said the Lord's Prayer, and I gave him the blessing. It was okay by then to leave Bob with others getting ready for dinner, sitting next to his friend Al.

God's peace is so amazing especially in the most difficult, heart wrenching times. Jesus says, ***“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.”*** (John 14:27 EHV) God's got this – whatever it is in your life. His plan was only a few days of grieving for Bob his turn came on February 5th. Jesus was there with His faithful promises to keep both Bob and Helen faithful to the end. Jesus already won for them and us the crown of victory which He so dearly wants to give all of you today. **Love the Freedom!** Trust Jesus' promise: ***“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”***

We stand in glorious **Freedom** as believers with the Lord's Apostle Paul: ***“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** (Romans 8:37–39) **Love the Freedom!** now and forever in Christ alone. Amen.