**1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 June 23, 2020 (Karen Brandt Funeral)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ but especially to you the friends and family of Karen Brandt,

What is the first word that comes to your mind when you think of Karen? Is it caring? Loving? Compassionate? Funny? Maybe it’s just the word fun. Those words may be yours based upon your experiences with our dear, departed sister in Christ, but what if it wasn’t an adjective? What if you had to pick a verb. What verb, or action, would be the first one you think of? I challenge you with this because here at Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama we have a mission statement, it is summed up on the back of our bulletins and it says ,”The Mission of Trinity Onekama” this is a mission that sums up what we do as brothers and sisters in Christ, as children of God our Heavenly Father, as people who have been transformed by the person and work of Jesus Christ who has redeemed us from sin and given to us the precious and amazing gift of everlasting life in his name. We exist to be a haven and hospital for sinners, we exist to gather around God’s Word and receive His Holy Sacraments, but our mission, is the word that first came to my mind, when thinking back on the Karen Brandt that I was blessed to know, for a much shorter amount of time than most of you gathered here today. If I had to pick a verb to describe Karen, it would be the word. Serve.

The mission of Trinity Lutheran Church in Onekama, is to serve. We love because Christ first loved us, and suffered for us, and died for us. We serve because Jesus came as a servant. We sing, “Make me a servant” Karen, played that hymn from right up in that balcony. We live to serve. Look back upon Karen’s life. Think of your own experiences with her. Perhaps you were her student. Perhaps you heard her playing for the services here at Trinity. Perhaps you just knew her as a friend, but even in that relationship you can think of some special instance in your life where she did something not for herself, but for you. Karen, served. She provided service. And she did so only out of the example that was shown to her in the Word of God that shows the service that Jesus provides for all of us. God sends His son to the world, because he loves the world. God didn’t send him to condemn the world. Jesus doesn’t come as a messenger of doom, of the inevitable destruction of those who are not perfect as he is, he comes to redeem those lost to sin and bring them back into fellowship with God. He comes to serve them. He gets down and washes the disciple’s feet. He touches the sick and heals them, he eats with sinners and tax collectors, he who is highly exalted over everything, humbles himself and comes down to the lowliest to serve. And that’s what we are called to do. To serve. That’s what we are called to be. Servants.

How did Karen serve you? Was she your mother? Was she your wife? Was she your friend? Was she a member of your family? Was she like a mother to you even though you weren’t actually her biological child? Did she serve with kindness? Did she serve with caring enough to inquire on how you were doing? Did she serve with the gift of her time? If there’s one thing I’ve learned in the short time I knew Karen it’s that she touched and impacted more lives than probably she even knew. More lives than just mine and my family’s in the year and a half that we’ve been blessed to live in this community.

But in her service we cannot put her on the pedestal, we cannot rename our church to Karen Brandt Lutheran Church in Onekama, Michigan. We cannot carve her face on the altar or build her a statue to go underneath the bell tower. Karen was a woman of service, who knew service only because of the example of Jesus Christ, because she was, as we all are, a sinner. She was not perfect. Again I remind you, the church is not for the perfect ones, it is not the country club of the moral elite, a place where the best of the best congregate and the worst of the worst are kept outside. This is a hospital for sinners. Karen was a sinner. Karen needed to hear the words of conviction that are found in the hymns that she herself played on Sunday mornings. Karen needed to hear the chastisement of God’s Law that she taught even to young minds. Karen came to this place not to be told how wonderful she is, but she came to be reminded that her sin wasn’t going to remain with her because she was forgiven. And she confessed and received the absolution of God. And she came forward, all the way from the back. For others it’s an easier trip up to God’s altar to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, but for Karen she would walk all the way from the balcony, down the stairs, up to the front, and then hurry back to the balcony, back up the stairs, and begin serving again by playing the communion hymns. And that trip to God’s altar seemed to get longer and longer, as the years went on. But she received it. Even if we brought it to her up in the balcony. She received the forgiveness that is given here in this house, not because she was so great, but because she was unworthy. She received it not as a reward for her service, but because God’s grace is shown in the gift of His Son, who gave his body and blood so that we would be saved.

Service. You have come today, to a funeral service. That’s what you will find in the hymnal if you look up this specific service that we are going through. In your bulletin it is classified as a service of remembrance. On a Sunday you come to a Divine Service. This service, is to “serve us” in the sense of it is for your benefit that it is done. On Sunday it is God’s service to you, where God serves you His Word, His gifts, His Sacrament, His truth and you are refreshed, renewed, comforted and equipped to face the world around you. This service isn’t for our dear sister in Christ Karen. She doesn’t need anything. She doesn’t need help up the stairs. She doesn’t need a stronger glasses prescription. She doesn’t need to see the doctor, or worry about her health. She doesn’t need to sit down and catch her breath. She doesn’t need or worry about anything that this world around us is dealing with, her needs are met for all eternity as she is in the presence of Jesus Christ. As she is in fellowship with God her father. This service is to serve you, because she will be greatly missed. By all the lives she touched and impacted. By her service to you, by her compassion, by her humor, by her joyful and positive spirit, by her care shown to everyone. But the joy we have today, is knowing that she is at peace, she is with the Lord, and she is no longer in pain or hardship. Hear again the words of our Epistle lesson from 1 Thessalonians 5, “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” This is a circumstance that on the outside you would assume there is no thanks, there is no rejoicing, and there is only a cause to pray. But instead let’s rejoice for the times we had with Karen, with the memories we can share together of how she impacted our lives. Let’s give thanks in this circumstance for the life she has in the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ, and not think about Karen in uncertainty or sadness over what happened to our dear sister in Christ, but instead giving thanks for the life she has. The joy we have is that when we are blessed to be called from this world to be with our Savior Jesus Christ, we will look over and see Karen, she will be there, we will know her, she will be as excited to see us again as we are to see her.

Yes, we will miss her. This church will not be the same without her. She is not replaceable. And we remember her, and mourn her, and are sad that she is no longer with us. But we do not mourn as those without hope. We do not let sadness and tears have the last say on a day like today, because that is not what Karen would want, and it is not our identity as God’s children and as followers of Jesus Christ. We live in the light of the empty tomb. We live in the new life that is given through the waters of Holy Baptism. We live as people of hope, knowing that death is not the end, but simply the beginning of our lives in our true heavenly home. God bless and keep you in his grace and may He comfort you with His Word in the days, and the weeks, and the months, and the years to come as you remember Karen and as you miss her. And May God equip us all to live lives of service, as Karen did, as she was taught to do, by our Savior, the servant King, the perfect lamb of sacrifice, who saved you from your sin and has given to you eternal life.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.