**Job 19:21-27 April 27, 2021 (Funeral for Thelma Zalud)**

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 family and friends of Thelma Zalud,

Job writes, “Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.” There are many names for this service. A funeral. A memorial service. If you look at the very top of your bulletin you will find that we classify what we are doing here today as a “Service of Remembrance” And we touch upon this in many ways. Today, is a day of remembrance, as you look at old pictures and remember Thelma. Thelma the mother, the wife, the friend, the fellow member of Trinity Lutheran Church. Oh that we could have a picture of every moment, of every memory, of all the good times. But we can’t. It’s impossible. Which is why we come together to share memories that we have of our beloved sister in Christ, and find comfort with each other of the times that we shared with her. The times that we remember and hold dear, the times that have been engraved upon our hearts as if they were chiseled into stone. My experiences with Thelma are limited, I’ve only been pastor here at Trinity in Onekama a few years. The Thelma I was blessed to know was always limited in terms of her health, she used a walker, she had trouble hearing. She sat, right about there, a few pews from the front, and the Elder and I would walk to give her Holy Communion. My memories of Thelma always have her smiling, putting out her hands to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and after pronouncing the blessing of the Lord upon her and the dismissal at the end of our time together and her receiving the Lord’s Supper, I will never forget that she would look up at me, and say “Thank you.” That was the Thelma I knew, and the Thelma I remember. A faithful child of God who was happy to receive the Sacrament of the Altar in thanksgiving. A kind woman who was happy to have me come by the house as she was sitting at the table, looking out at the lake, and even though she was limited in hearing everything that we were talking about, still she would ask about my family, and my wife, and my children. That’s what I remember.

“Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever!” Job describes with great passion what he wishes he could make known forever to the people as he suffers here on Earth. He wishes for the people to know the truth of what we were just singing about, and the theme of the entire Easter Season. “For I know that my Redeemer lives.” That’s the part of this “Service of Remembrance” that I pray never gets lost as you remember Thelma, and your own stories and memories of her. This service is a time of remembrance of earthly stories and experiences, of times spent together with Thelma, but it can’t just be that. If that’s all we take out of this time in God’s house than it is a disservice to the Word of God and the truth and comfort that comes from what Thelma is experiencing now in the presence of God her Heavenly Father and Jesus Her Lord and Savior and Redeemer. That’s our own struggles here on this Earth, that’s the confusion and distortion of the importance of God’s Word that Satan throws in our way as we go about our lives. To only focus on the here, and the now. And to neglect memories of the past, or to think about the experiences that await in the future.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, on a day like today, as we remember Thelma, the reality is we have to speak about our experiences with her on Earth, in the past tense. These things happened, they are not currently happening, and they won’t happen in the future. That’s the reality of today. Death. Paul writes in our Epistle lesson from 1 Corinthians 15, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” All die. There’s no escaping it. There’s no running from it. Ignorance is no excuse to the reality that we don’t get to stay here, or take anything with us. Death is our reality, after the fall into sin, and it was the reality that Thelma had to face her whole life. That this was inevitably going to happen, and it will happen for all of us. We all have sinned and therefore we all will die, we live in a fallen creation, cursed with sin and therefore it is perishable, corrupted, and finite. We have to remember that, we can’t ignore it.

But instead of despairing, or finding that to be a sobering thought of sadness, we also today remember the concrete means that connect us to the grace, the very undeserved love, of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who died so that we will live forever with him. “For as in Adam all die” this is true, but also true is that, “so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” Through the waters of Holy Baptism, that Thelma was washed in, cleansed of sin, the old Adam drowned and dead, and the new creation that she was made in the eyes of God. Again, as this is a service of remembrance, remember that she had already died to sin in Holy Baptism! She already was restored and made new through the water and God’s Word. Remember the purpose of receiving the very body and blood of Jesus Christ here in God’s house and in His Divine Service. I wasn’t just walking down to see Thelma to give her a snack in the middle of the service, because we were such great friends and I thought she was hungry! Remember the purpose of the Sacrament, the reason that Jesus instituted it, and why we do it. Remember and be comforted to know that Thelma received the very body and blood of Jesus Christ in with and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of her sins and the strengthening of her faith. She knew that! She hungered for that forgiveness and this bread of life that she received, even when she was limited physically to come forward on her own. Thelma was a witness to the truth that we don’t earn anything in the eyes of God. We don’t come to God and he rewards us based on our actions, instead it is God who comes to us, feeds us, provides for us, and gives us the forgiveness of our sins and the comfort of knowing that death is not the end for us, but instead that we shall be made alive. Or as Job writes, not just that we know that our redeemer lives, but that “After my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.”

Remember the good times with Thelma, remember the conversations, the moments from your childhood or trips with her, remember times by the lake or her moments with her children, or grandchildren, or great-grandchildren! Remember the blessings she had in her earthly life, this is acceptable and wonderful and full of comfort and joy. But don’t forget the truly important, concrete, biblical truth that she isn’t gone. She has not ceased to exist. She isn’t just lost forever. She is with Christ. She sees her faith realized. She knows, that her Redeemer lives, not just in song, but in person. She can touch the holes in his hands, and the place in his side. She knows him. She sees him. She’s with him. And we have nothing to fear. One day we will be blessed to see her again, but in that moment it won’t be about remembering earthly recipes, boat trips, or how nice the lake looks during an earthly sunset, it will be about rejoicing in the life we have on account of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I pray for you all, for comfort and peace, as you remember Thelma today, and tomorrow. As you’ve been blessed to remember her before in another service. As you see things that spark memories in the weeks, months, and years to come. I pray that in those moments, when the pain and reality of her absence here on Earth hit hard, and you feel the sadness of the separation that sin brings, that you also find comfort and peace in remembering her baptism, her confirmation, her reception of Christ’s body and blood in Holy Communion, and that she isn’t gone, but is with Christ forever. God bless and keep you in His love and mercy.

Amen.

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

Amen.