

Sermon for The Funeral of Joanne Rasmussen

Date: July 28, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN



Old Testament: Isaiah 55:1-2,6-12

Epistle Reading: Ephesians 2:4-10

Gospel Reading: John 3:14-21

Sermon Title: Our Faith Is Not In Vain

Hymns:

LSB 790 – Praise to the Lord

Chancel: What a Friend We Have In Jesus

Praise: Shout to the Lord

LSB 801 – How Great Thou Art *(Multilingual)*



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Obituary¹

Joanne Rasmussen, age 69 of Austin, Minnesota, died Sunday morning, July 22, 2018 at home. She was born February 22, 1949 in Pueblo, Colorado, the daughter of Grady and Bertha (Stjernholm) Smith. Joanne grew up on a farm and graduated in 1967 from high school in Fowler, Colorado. Upon graduation she attended school at Augustana University in Sioux Falls, South Dakota before transferring to University of Southern Colorado in Pueblo where she graduated in 1971 with her degree in teaching. From 1971-1972 Joanne taught fifth grade in Las Animas, Colorado. One day in 1971, she was at church in Fowler when her mother introduced her to a man by the name of Stanley Rasmussen who was stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado in the Army. On June 9, 1972 the couple married in the very same church they met in one year earlier. That same year the couple moved to Austin, where Stan began working for Hormel Foods Corporation. At the end of 1972 the couple was relocated by Hormel to Montevideo, Minnesota. In 1973 they moved to Sigourney, Iowa where their family of two grew to a family of four. In 1984, the family was relocated back to Austin. Joanne spent many years teaching pre-school and taught at Head Start. After teaching she began a career with Rachel's Hope - A Caring Pregnancy Center and in 2007 she was hired as their director. She continued to provide direction to the center until 2015. In 2010, the couple began wintering in Mesa, Arizona where she enjoyed many new activities. Joanne loved tending to her flowers, traveling and most importantly, helping others. Her mission in life was to help other people get what they needed and, in the process, share her love of God. She shared her love and compassion while volunteering at St. John's Lutheran Church, The Red Cross, Lutheran Disaster Relief and Rachel's Hope. She will be greatly missed by her family and friends.

Survivors include her husband, Stanley Rasmussen of Austin; daughter, Brenda (Rob) Zahn of Farmington Hills, Michigan; son, Doug (Katie) Rasmussen of Madison, Wisconsin; five grandchildren, Kjirsten Zahn, Ainsley Zahn, Felicity Zahn, Grady Rasmussen, and Marketa Rasmussen; four sisters Mary Beth (Bill) Asselin of Clovis, California, Katherine (Wayne) Hahn of Paxton, Nebraska, Kirstine (Rick) Mitchell of Naples, Italy, and Gail (Brian) Anderson of Thornton, Colorado; sister-in-law, Karen Smith of Pueblo, Colorado; many nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends. Joanne was preceded in death by her parents, Grady and Bertha Smith; and brother Dr. Thomas Smith.

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May God's grace, peace and mercy pursue you all of your days. Amen.

This was a tough sermon to write. Joanne was so full of life. She was full of happiness and shared the joy of her faith with so many. Some of you are here perhaps because she shared her faith with you. She and I had a bunch of plans for the future here at St. John's, but God had other plans. God said, "Joanne, it's time to come home." Her family was given a time to say their goodbyes and then she was gone.

Why? That's the question people ask. Why? Why did God have to take her? Maybe some of you know some of the things Joanne did not only in the church but in the whole community. She volunteered her time in several places. She gave of herself selflessly. She touched the hearts and minds of so many, and she loved them. So why? Why did God have to take her?

Did she do something wrong? Did she offend someone that God liked better? Was the problem that she just didn't do enough? The answer to all those questions, and so many others like them is, "No." Those questions come from a real problem with our American culture. We so often think of sin as only those bad things we do. We think of sin as only the stuff we do in our lives that is short of God-pleasing. The truth is sin is far more than that.

To believe that sin is only what we do is to suggest that children are born perfect and only learn to sin later. Children are not born perfect. Children are born with physical and spiritual problems. The Bible says we are sinful from conception. We are sinful before we are even born.² You see sin is not just what we do. The trials of this world whether they come early or late in life are the result of sin not God's anger.

Sin is not just what we do wrong. Sin is what we are. We are sinful, filled with sin. Sin is the tar-like stain on us that cannot be washed off, that cannot be removed. It is not only on us it is on everything. Everything in all of creation is stained by sin and suffers because of it.³ Sin is what we are. Sin is the mess we live in. Sin is separation from God. Sin is death.

Way back in Genesis chapter three God had warned Adam and Eve that if they broke the rule, "don't eat from that tree" they would die.⁴ Yet when they broke the rule they didn't die. They lived on. God punished them.⁵ We are their decedents. From our point of view they did not die but from God's point of view they did.

You see we like God, are eternal beings.⁶ From the moment of our conception we are forever. There will never be a time when we will not exist. The reason God said, "the day you eat of it you will surely die"⁷ is because on that day they were permanently separated from God. He felt the same way we feel right now being that we are now separated from Joanne. We will not see her again in this life. She has been cut off from us, separated from us. We can't talk to her again or hear her voice again. Those thoughts make us sad and they should. Separation

2 **Psalm 51:5** – Indeed, I was born guilty. I was a sinner when my mother conceived me.

3 **Romans 8:22** – We know that all creation has been groaning with the pains of childbirth up to the present time.

4 **Genesis 2:16-17** – The Lord God commanded the man. He said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must never eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because when you eat from it you will certainly die."

5 **Genesis 3:14-19**

6 **Genesis 1:27** – God created humans in his image. In the image of God he created them. He created them male and female.

7 **Genesis 2:17**

hurts. Death hurts. Sin hurts. The pain you feel now is the same pain God felt the day Adam and Eve sinned and were forever cut off from Him.

So where is the hope in that message? If we are stained with sin even before we are born then where's the hope? If God demands and commands perfection; if God will not tolerate any flaw no matter how small then what hope do we have? If we are cut off and separated from God then Heaven is not ours. So where do we end up?

Fear not. Don't worry or be concerned. You see God calls us His children⁸ for a reason, and God would not endure the thought of being separated from His children forever. Though we could do nothing to get back to Him, though we could do nothing to bring ourselves back to life with Him, He could, and He did.

God the Father sent Jesus Christ His Son to do what we could not. Jesus was sent to restore us to the Father. That is why Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."⁹ Sin that had stained us could not touch Him. Try as it might He remained unmarred and unscathed. He then offered Himself as the One who would stand in our place. He did not just take our sins on Himself He became sin itself.¹⁰

When Jesus shouted those words, "My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?!¹¹" He was in Hell while He yet breathed. He took all of the Father's rage and contempt for every imperfection on us and claimed them as His own so that He could claim each of us as His own and give to us the reward of a kingdom without end.¹²

When Jesus said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."¹³ He was voluntarily, by His own authority, at the time of His own choosing, dying for you and me. His last words, "It is finished."¹⁴ were not words of defeat. They were words of victory! All that was necessary for Your salvation was complete. The battle was over. The Father's rage exhausted. Your salvation secured. The work was finished. He proved that on Easter Sunday when He walked out of the tomb very much alive.

So now we wait. We still live in the sin stained world. Sin and sin affect still contend with us but not forever. We wait. We wait like Joanne waited. We wait with faith. We wait with trust. We wait with sureness and security. We wait with peace in our hearts because we have a promise made to us by One who does not break His promises.¹⁵ We have a promise made to us by God Almighty Himself. He says, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved."¹⁶

8 **John 1:12** – He gave the right to become God's children to everyone who believed in him.

9 **John 14:6** – Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one goes to the Father except through me.

10 **2 Corinthians 5:21** – God had Christ, who was sinless, become sin so that we might receive God's approval through him.

11 **Matthew 27:46** (*Jesus is quoting Psalm 22:1*) – About three o'clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

12 **Luke 1:33** – Your son will be king of Jacob's people forever, and his kingdom will never end.

13 **Luke 23:46** – Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." After he said this, he died.

14 **John 19:30** (*Jesus is quoting Psalm 22:31*) – After Jesus had taken the vinegar, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

15 **Judges 2:1** – The Messenger of the Lord went from Gilgal to Bochim. He said, "... I will never break my promise to you."

16 **Mark 16:16** – Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Saved for what? Saved from what? The day is coming when Jesus the Holy Christ of God will return. When He does He will not return quietly and humbly like He did the first time in Bethlehem. He is going to come with power and majesty and might. In regal array He will come, with the authority to judge all people living and dead.

The dead He will raise. All people will have their physical bodies restored to the perfection the Father always intended them to be. Bodies that will never grow old, and never die, or feel the affect or sin again.¹⁷ Then Jesus will take those who believe in Him home to Heaven. A place of a new Heaven and a new Earth that will never pass away and will never know the stain of sin again.¹⁸ How do we know that? We know that because God has spoken.

That was the hope Joanne clung to. That was the faith she cherished and desperately needed to share with all of those she loved and cared for. That was the faith held in her heart. Faith that has given her the privilege of realizing the eternal security from sin that she now enjoys.

Now she waits. With the anticipation of a child as Christmas Day approaches she waits. Not with wondering if it will come, but with anticipation knowing it must come. She, like us, waits for that day when Jesus Christ will return and all of us will be reunited with all those who die in the faith. Reunited to live a life that will never end and never again know this pain that we feel today.

While we say our temporary goodbye to Joanne here we know that there she has been welcomed home. Home to a place where all struggles and suffering are forever removed and pain is, at its worst, only a distant memory of something long gone.

You too should cling to that faith. Not to human invented traditions. Not to human invented rules and regulations. Not to your own efforts. Not to your own intellect. Cling to faith in Jesus. That free gift from God given to all who trust in Him. Don't throw that out. Don't push that away. Grab it. Hold on to it with all that is in you.¹⁹

Then know that by God's grace, God's power, and God's promise you will be saved by that faith which God has given you just as Joanne has been. Know that our time away from her will be short compared to the time-eternal we will have together when Jesus comes again.

Amen.

17 **1 Corinthians 15:53-55** – This body that decays must be changed into a body that cannot decay. This mortal body must be changed into a body that will live forever. When this body that decays is changed into a body that cannot decay, and this mortal body is changed into a body that will live forever, then the teaching of Scripture will come true: “Death is turned into victory!” Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?

18 **Revelation 21:1-4** – I saw a new heaven and a new earth, because the first heaven and earth had disappeared, and the sea was gone. Then I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, dressed like a bride ready for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne say, “God lives with humans! God will make his home with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There won't be any more death. There won't be any grief, crying, or pain, because the first things have disappeared.”

19 **2 John 1:8** – Be careful that you don't destroy what we've worked for, but that you receive your full reward.